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Women Can Vote Now: Feminism and the Women's Suffrage Movement in

Argentina, 1900-1955

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Women Can Vote Now: Feminism and the Women's Suffrage Movement in Argentina, 1900-1955

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2004

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Jonathan Brown, for all his help and guidance in the completion of this work. Thanks also to the review committee, Dr. Virginia Burnett, Dr. Susan Deans-Smith, Dr. Nicolas Shumway, and Dr. Mauricio Tenorio for their editorial comments and suggestions. Finally, thanks to Andrew McFarland, Cindy Roberts, Lana Roberts, Kristi Rowlett, Michael Rowlett, Whitney Rowlett, Will Toporek, and Trevor Watt for their friendship and support; and to my family- Mom, Dad, Peter, Bob, Jody, Dave, Candace, and Kasey for their love.

Women Can Vote Now: Feminism and the Women's Suffrage Movement in Argentina, 1900-1955

Publication No._____

Gregory Sowles Hammond, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

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In 1900, the first women's political organization in Argentina, the National Council of Women, met for the first time. The Council brought together feminists from a range of ideologies, and attempted to unite women of all social classes in an effort to uphold their rights. However, the experience of the Council demonstrated that differences of personality, political orientation, and especially socioeconomic status created barriers that appeals to a common female identity could not overcome. Although most feminists agreed on the need for reforms such as the right to vote, they did not agree on the best means for achieving those goals, or on the priorities for the women's rights movement. Nevertheless, the campaign for suffrage gained considerable momentum over the years, helping to reinforce and reinforced by movements for educational reform, workplace protection, and legislation on divorce, prostitution, and alcohol. The suffrage movement therefore gained credibility despite the attitude of the government, which usually ignored women's voting rights as an issue. It was not until 1947 that the government of Juan Perón finally enacted a national suffrage law, followed by the creation of the Peronist Women's Party under the leadership of his wife, Evita. In this way, Perón co-opted the women's movement, appealing directly to working class women while bypassing middle class feminists. The Peronist Women's Party continued to mobilize female voters after Evita's death in 1952, placing women in the national congress until Perón's overthrow in 1955.

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Introduction

> We believe that female suffrage will not be obtained in this country until women become prepared for its conquest; Legislators do no more than provide the legal form to what has lived in the soul of nations for many years.
>
> -Alicia Moreau de Justo[1]

> Although it is not a fundamental part of the feminist movement, the vote is a powerful instrument and with it the women of the world will be able to acquire all of our rights…that is, the great right to simply be *women.*
>
> -Eva Perón[2]

In 1899, Cecilia Grierson, the first Argentine woman ever to receive a medical degree, attended the meeting of the International Council of Women (ICW) in London. The ICW had its roots in the Seneca Falls conference of 1848, the starting point of organized feminism in the United States. The Council also included prominent feminists from across Europe and North America, and had by then attracted women from around the globe. Grierson, named honorary Vice President of the ICW conference, returned to Argentina determined to create a local chapter of the organization. On September 25, 1900 the first meeting of the National Women's Council of Argentina (NWC) came to order, with Grierson as Vice President. Alvina Van Praet de Sala served as president. Van Praet, who had also served as president of the prestigious Sociedad de Beneficencia, Argentina's premier charitable organization, had been instrumental in helping Grierson bring together women's groups from across the nation for the Council's first gathering. With this meeting, Argentina took on a leading role in the feminist

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[1] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El sufragio femenino," *Humanidad Nueva* 4:2 (February 1911) 94.

[2] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Relevo, 1973) 196. Emphasis in the original.

movement of South America and established the first official organizational tie between that continent and the global feminist movement.[3] Why, then, did it take until 1947 for Argentine women to win the vote, when several other Latin American nations had already done so?

The National Women's Council, and the feminist groups that co-existed with it in later years, dedicated itself to the promotion of women's interests in general as they applied to Argentine society. Throughout the first half of the century, these groups campaigned for equal civil rights with men, the prohibition of alcohol and prostitution, educational and workplace reform, and other social improvements. One issue in particular united these themes while also causing controversy, and even division, among the feminists themselves- women's suffrage. Political rights in many ways defined the women's movement, distinguishing feminists from other types of reformers. Feminists believed in the vote not simply as a right, but also as "the weapon" with which women could "fight…for their own wellbeing and that of her inseparable companion, man."[4] Yet not all women agreed on the importance of, or even the need for, voting rights. It would require decades of effort for feminists to come to a consensus on suffrage.

Demands for the vote in Argentina appeared well before the formal women's movement, and went a long way towards shaping that movement, much as it had in other countries. As early as the 1870's, women had the municipal vote in San Juan province. Individual women had also made pleas for the vote, with little effect. The constitution of 1853 used gender neutral terms when referring to citizens and those qualified to vote, as did those laws regarding electoral practices. For this reason, women's suffrage in Argentina merely

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[3] Cecilia Grierson, "Marcha progresiva de la idea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:8, December 1908, p. 26. For the ICW and Seneca Falls convention, see Patricia Ward D'Itri *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999).

[4] "La mujer y las elecciones," *La Vanguardia*, 23 February 1920.

required the passage of a law, as opposed to a constitutional reform as in the case of the United States. However, following Grierson's contact with the ICW and the creation of the National Council of Women calls for suffrage became louder and more consistent. In newspapers, national and international conferences, books, and rallies, feminists called on the government to recognize their political rights- rights that the constitution had never specifically denied them. In time, the argument for suffrage took a firm hold on Argentine political discourse. By the 1930s the major newspapers of the day had declared themselves in favor of suffrage. Vocal opposition to suffrage in the halls of Congress was the exception rather than the rule, and the major parties all included pro-suffrage articles in their platforms (though with varying degrees of enthusiasm).[5] Yet it was not until 1947 that a national suffrage law took effect under the government of Juan Domingo Perón. Three distinct, but related, causes explain this long delay. First, unlike the earlier feminist leaders, Perón's ability to mobilize the population in general, and the working class in particular, behind his policies guaranteed his ability to ensure that suffrage would come to pass during his regime. A corresponding inability on the part of earlier feminists to establish a widespread popular base allowed the male politicians who held the desired reform in their hands to delay suffrage while paying feminist ideals lip-service.[6] Finally, divisions among the early feminists over strategy, leadership, ideology and goals greatly inhibited their ability to achieve their aims.

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[5] "Declaración de principios del partido socialista argentina," *La Vanguardia,* 2 January 1904; "Aprobó, en parte, su plataforma electoral el Partido Democrata Nacional," *La Argentina,* 2 August 1931; "Hoy se proclamara la formula presidencial de la Union Cívica Radical," *La Argentina,* 28 September 1931; "En las elecciones internas del Partido Democrata Progresista podrán votar las mujeres," *La Razón*, 6 August 1931.

[6] It should be pointed out here that those who worked hardest within congress for women's suffrage were also, of course, male. The author is cognizant that the position of a man analyzing a women's movement may seem awkward. In addition to pointing out that there were indeed male feminists (and women who strongly disagreed with feminist goals), I would also point out

On September 23, 1947 the Plaza de Mayo filled with jubilant men and women. According to government accounts, half a million men and women "of the most divergent social classes" had gathered to celebrate the enactment of law 13.010, which had passed the Chamber of Deputies earlier that month after over a year of delay. The new law gave women the right to vote in all elections in the same manner as male citizens, but exempted women from mandatory military service.[7] Through this law, President Juan Domingo Perón achieved a major victory for his regime. In the years that followed, Perón courted female voters and created opportunities for them to participate in his broad-based political coalition. These efforts paid off for Perón during his re-election campaign of 1951. Perón won that election with 61 percent of the male vote and 64 percent of the female vote.[8] Women also became members of Congress for the first time; by 1955 women represented one-third of the Peronist delegation in the national legislature, a figure that has gone unmatched in Argentina to the present day.

María Eva Duarte de Perón, better known as Evita, came to dominate Peronist women's organization and policy. Through her speeches and the publications she directed, Evita spearheaded the Peronist suffrage campaign following her husband's election in 1946. In 1949, she founded and became president of the Partido Peronista Femenina (Peronist Women's Party), the organization through which the Peronist political machine educated and drew in female political support, and to which the female congressional deputies and

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that history is about understanding the past completely, and that includes examining groups outside of the authors own gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, etc.

[7] *La mujer ya puede votar* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaría de Informaciones, 1950) 6-8; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados*Diario de sesiones de 1947*, Vol. 4, p. 252.

[8] Estela dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989), 59-66.

senators of the early 1950's all belonged. Through these publicity and organizational drives, Evita came to be closely associated with female political activity and women's voting rights. The minister of the interior even suggested that the women's suffrage law should be known as the "Evita Law".[9] The Perón regime, never shy in claiming success, declared that suffrage was one of its foremost accomplishments.

That so many women seemed to accept the Peronist claim as the vindicator of women's rights and their enthusiastic participation in his regime suggests not only that women accepted his programs, but also rejected past leaders and policies. These leaders included the women who had worked hardest and longest for women's rights and suffrage. Despite similarities in tactics and rhetoric, the women's movement headed by Evita Perón expressed considerable antipathy towards these earlier feminists. Evita based this criticism on class distinctions- early suffragists were largely middle class, well educated, and associated with leftist political movements.[10] The bulwark of the Peronist movement, on the other hand, centered on working class men and women with limited educational opportunities and a socially conservative outlook. These differences impeded the ability of early suffragists to obtain their political goals. It was precisely the mass appeal of Juan and Evita Perón that made passage of a suffrage law possible, and it was the overriding concern of the Peronists with unity and legitimacy that made suffrage necessary to their regime.

The success of suffrage under Perón resembled the experience of many other Latin American regimes described by the word "Populist." Populism in the Latin American context signified a political strategy that incorporated as broad a

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[9] *La mujer ya puede votar,* 16.

[10] For examples of the rivalry between the early feminists and Evita, see Eva Perón, *Discurso de Eva Perón en el acto inaugural de la asamblea nacional del movimiento peronista femenino* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Información, 1950) 24-5 and "La mujer frente a problemas actuales," *La Vanguardia,* supplement, 11 March 1947.

Ecuador (partial)	1929
Brazil	1932
Uruguay	1932
Cuba	1934
El Salvador	1939
Dominican Republic	1942
Guatemala	1945
Panama	1945
Ecuador (full)	1946
Argentina	1947
Venezuela	1947
Chile	1949
Costa Rica	1949
Haiti	1950
Bolivia	1952
Mexico	1953
Honduras	1955
Nicaragua	1955
Peru	1955
Honduras	1956
Colombia	1957
Paraguay	1958

Table 1- Women's Suffrage in Latin America[11]

cross-section of the population as possible. Such a strategy demanded a large electorate, and the inclusion of women voters suited that strategy perfectly. More generally, suffrage in Latin America and many other parts of the world usually followed moments of political crisis, when a new government might seek stability and legitimacy through democratic reform. While this pattern does not always hold true for Latin America (Mexico being an important exception) most Latin American administrations justified women's suffrage as a necessary progressive reform. In this way, populist regimes could also overcome the chauvinism of their male supporters. The vote would serve to strengthen the nation, but without

[11] Source- Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 350-1.

fundamentally challenging the social order that populist governments swore to preserve.

While Juan and Evita Perón certainly made women's suffrage a priority, and were instrumental in ensuring its final passage, they were hardly the first to support female voting rights. Neither was the "Evita Law" the first legislative proposal on the subject. As early as 1919, as suffrage projects achieved success in Britain and the United States, a law granting women the right to vote came up for consideration before the Chamber of Deputies in Argentina. In the years that followed, suffrage proposals became a regular issue in both houses of Congress. Senators and Deputies, usually belonging to the Socialist Party, put forward suffrage bills seven times between 1922 and 1942. The final bill, which first appeared in the Senate in 1946, drew directly from some of these earlier proposals.[12] The Peronists did not exactly ignore these earlier efforts, but did emphasize that they were the ones responsible for making this long sought after goal a reality.[13] However, these claims masked the process that led to suffrage over the previous decades. Several important precedents made women's suffrage in Argentina a reality. Prior to 1912, the dominant party of the nation, the National Autonomist Party, controlled the electoral system. This meant that most men as well as all women could not vote. However, in that year a reform

[12] Aldo Armando Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1948). Cocca provides a brief overview of each suffrage proposal, some of which included limitations on the vote such as literacy requirements or a higher age limit for female voters. The final suffrage law gave women voters the same rights as male voters but excluded them from military service. Cocca also describes the legislative projects that would allow women in the capital to vote in municipal elections beginning in 1916.

[13] Lucila de Gregorio Lavié, *La Ciudadana: para las mujeres que votan* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Argentina, 1948), 19-21. Most of the suffrage projects matched the final version, with some exceptions- the 1922 and 1925 bills would have granted the vote to literate women only, while the 1935 bill included the same military service obligations for women as for men; "De acuerdo a nuestra carta magna, el sufragio limitado es inconstitucional," *Democracia,* 3 March 1947.

law passed designed to make voting rights a reality. The Sáenz Peña law enforced the secret ballot and made voting for males mandatory in an effort to improve "civic virtue." In this way, universal male suffrage became a reality in Argentina, bringing with it a change of regime. However, women's suffrage was not yet a serious topic of political debate in Congress.[14] Nevertheless, the post-reform governments of Hipólito Yrigoyen and Marcelo Alvear brought the first women's suffrage laws to Congress and oversaw the other reforms that helped to make the case for female voting rights.

Not all of the efforts of the early suffragists met with congressional intransigence. In 1926 Congress passed an important revision to the Argentine Civil Code of 1870. The code had limited the legal rights of women to those of minors, except in the case of widows. This severely restricted the economic opportunities and legal rights open to women. For example, women had to obtain their husband's permission before seeking employment. The removal of these restrictions was a necessary precursor of any serious attempt to grant women the right to vote. The successful reform of 1926 gave women full civil equality with men, reinvigorating the suffrage movement and setting the stage for serious consideration of women's voting rights.[15]

By the time of the suffrage law's approval, Argentina also had a model of women's suffrage within the nation. The western province of San Juan granted women the vote less than a year after the civil code thanks to the support of the

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[14] República Argentina, *Leyes nacionales, año 1911* (Buenos Aires: G. Kraft,1916) 472-501; Hipólito Yrigoyen, *Pueblo y gobierno*, vol. 3, *La reparación fundamental*, 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1956), 377-9; David Rock, *El radicalismo argentino, 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: 1992).

[15] Congreso Nacional, Senado de la Nación, *Diario de sesiones* v.1, 1926, p. 639-49; "El senado dejó aprobado el proyecto sancionado en diputados de derechos civiles de la mujer," *La Nación*, 15 September 1926.; Juan Carlos Rebora, *La familia chilena y la familia argentina* (La Plata: Universidad de La Plata, 1938) 22-3; Leonor Vain, *Evolución de los derechos de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Belgrano, 1989) 108-11; República Argentina, Congreso Nacional, Camara de diputados, *Diario de sesiones*, v. 4, p. 40-2, remarks by Antonio de Tomaso.

powerful, populist-style administration of the Cantoni brothers. In this way, Argentina was following trends seen in many other countries in which a province or state extended the vote to women well before the nation as a whole.[16] However, other provincial attempts to grant women the vote often met with failure or delays. In Santa Fe, for instance, the constitution of 1921 included municipal suffrage for women. However, political infighting in the provincial government blocked the enactment of that Constitution, and Santa Fe women could vote in local elections until 1938. Suffragists, naturally, made the most of these examples, pointing out that San Juan and Santa Fe functioned quite smoothly after the vote, contradicting the worst fears of the anti-suffragists.[17] While the Peronists might have been willing to acknowledge previous legislative efforts, the most vocal advocates of suffrage and other women's issues did not receive so much attention from historians. These early feminists, like the legislators who had introduced the first national suffrage legislation, tended to be members of the Socialist Party, or at least belonged to left-of-center political groups. These groups later became Perón's most outspoken critics. Not surprisingly the Peronist press proved more willing than the unaffiliated press to disregard their efforts. Nevertheless these activists not only laid the groundwork for women's suffrage in Argentina, but also created the precedent for women to take on a greater role in public life.

In spite of the contribution early suffragists made to the idea of women participating in public life, the number of women who actually made their presence felt in the political realm appears to have been fairly small before the rise of Perón. As in other countries, suffragist leaders in Argentina tended to be

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[16] See *Report of the Inter-American Commission of Women to the Eighth International Conference of American States on the Political and Civil Rights of Women* (Washington, DC: Panamerican Union, 1938).

[17] Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino.,* 9.

very well educated and of the middle class. The first field of activity for female activism in Argentina was the academy and the professions. Beginning in the late 1800's, women slowly began to enter the University and take on such advanced fields as medicine, law, and especially education. Their accomplishments in these fields led these women to experience first hand the limitations placed on them by society, inspiring them to take on the challenge of winning greater rights. Knowledge of the law and of medicine also made them aware of other problems affecting women and society. Education, public health and hygiene, labor conditions, childcare, alcoholism, prostitution, crime, and mental health all became subjects of the suffragists efforts. Indeed, for some feminists voting was a peripheral issue in the face of more pressing needs such as workplace regulations or improved health care. Others, such as Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, considered voting rights to be the central issue- throughout the 1920's Lanteri ran for congress through the own feminist party.

Despite their best efforts, and nominal acceptance of the principal of women's suffrage among political leaders, feminists were unable to win widespread public support for their goals during the first half of the 20th century. While feminists often worked with existing parties, particularly the Socialists and the Unión Cívica Radical, they made little headway in making suffrage a popular issue. Part of the reason may lie with the burdens of being female and working class in the early 20th century- working class women were either too busy with making ends meet or too worried about the repercussions of political action to take part in feminist campaigns (though union activity was not out of the question). Certain feminist leaders, cognizant of the need to include working class women, cited a different rationale for lack of support among female laborers. According to Carolina Muzzilli, a self-taught feminist leader, "in order to achieve women's emancipation it is first necessary to lay the groundwork by educating the intelligence of proletarian women." For feminists, the most

important task was to clarify "the clouded intelligence of the woman of the workshop and factory, descending even to the social class to they belong in order to morally elevate them."[18] This paternalistic attitude reflected another obstacle to the feminist cause. Opponents of suffrage frequently argued that most women were either unprepared for or apathetic towards the vote.[19] Many feminists shared doubts about the abilities of working class women to serve as political activists, though they were charitable in explaining this lack of suitability or pointed out that most men were ignorant regarding politics as well. In either case, condescending attitudes towards working class women surely hindered the ability of feminists to build a mass movement.

In order to achieve women's rights, feminists had to convince both men and women of the necessity of change. Men, however, were the focus of many of their efforts. "For the success of our feminine cause," said Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, "I consider the conquest of men to be an urgent necessity." Men were responsible, in her view, for any defects in the ability of women to act in the public sphere- "They wanted [women] to be dolls, and so they became," she explained.[20] This focus recognized the power that men held as politicians, employers, and union leaders to obstruct or facilitate the feminist cause. However, efforts to win over men may also have limited the ability of feminists to appeal to women. The challenge that suffragists faced was to prove that voting rights for women would not greatly disrupt society, and would in fact benefit the nation in many ways. Working class men often saw women as competitors for

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[18] Carolina Muzzilli, "Emancipación de la mujer," *La Vanguardia,* 26 September 1910.

[19] For example, see Juan B. Magaldi, "¿Corresponde a la mujer un puesto en las contiendas electorales en el parlamento?," *Bandera Argentina,* 9 July, 1938; Juan Ignacio Cedoya in Miguel J. Font, *La mujer: encuesta feminista argentina,* (Buenos Aires: N.P., 1921?), 177; Herminia C. Brumana in Font, *Ibid.,* 184.

[20] Raul Doria, "La candidata en la intimidad," *Caras y Caretas*, 31 January 1920, 23.

jobs, and may also have seen suffrage as a threat to their political role. What is more, centuries of tradition had dictated that men were the ones fit for public life, not women. Men of any class would see women involved in politics as a threat to their own role in society. For men and women, then, there seemed to be little advantage, and potentially great harm, in allowing women the right to vote.

The chief threat posed by feminism was to the "traditional" model of society. These views of women in Argentine society held that they belonged to the so-called domestic sphere, the realm of the home, family, and private life. This ideal, while exalting women for their skill in fulfilling the necessary roles of mother and wife, curtailed women's ability to participate in society at large. Suffragists in Argentina, regardless of political ideology, tended to exalt motherhood as the natural feminine vocation while emphasizing the moral purity and essentially conservative outlook that all women supposedly shared. "It is beyond doubt," wrote Elvira López, "that women are born for the home, that she reigns over it and that it is the most noble aspiration of her soul."[21] At the same time, they argued that suffrage would herald needed reforms in areas such as public health, educational opportunity and anti-alcohloism.[22] Suffrage would therefore both reinforce and expand women's place in the social order.

While the majority of feminists tended towards the left, politically, it was by no means the case that all agreed on the goals, methods, or leadership of the campaign for women's rights. The National Council of Women, in its first years, brought together women from across the political spectrum. However, conflicts arose between the two founders of the Council, Grierson and Van Praet. Van Praet sought a more moderate and restrained approach to advocating women's

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[21] Elvira López, *El moviineto feminista* [Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1901], 17. This work, which began as López's doctoral thesis, represents one of the earliest and most detailed studies of the international feminist movement and the arguments in favor of feminism to be found in Argentina.

[22] Luisa Israel, "Argentina y el voto," *La Nación,* 21 November 1936.

rights, preferring to avoid politics and focus instead on social work and education. Grierson, on the other hand, sought to broaden the scope of the Council's activities to include political activism in the sense of intervening in elections and government business. In 1910, this conflict led to Grierson's departure from the Council, which continued to tread lightly in regards to political activity for years to come.[23] Well before this split, however, other feminist groups with distinct political agendas had come into being. The Socialist Women's Centers, the Women's Centers of the Radical Party, and the *Universitarias Argentinas* all provided alternatives for women who sought to advance various feminist causes by political means. While these groups did not always conflict, the diversity of groups claiming to represent the interests of all women surely complicated matters by guaranteeing that a unified women's movement would be impossible.[24]

In order to explore fully the timing of suffrage in Argentina, we will need to clarify the use of certain terms that will be used in this study. First, the term "feminist", a particularly loaded term in modern parlance, will be used in its broadest sense. Feminist, in this case, will refer to anyone who, through rhetoric or action, sought essential improvements in the daily lives of all women. Such a broad definition allows us to include not only those who sought equality of the

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[23] Alvina Van Praet de Sala, "Cartas de la señora presidenta del consejo a la Dra. Cecilia Grierson," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 3:7-8 (Sept. 1910), p.9-11. Among the reasons cited for Grierson's expulsion was her participation in a conference that supported "ideas completely antagonistic to those observed by the Argentine Council." The Conference to which Van Praet refers supported women's suffrage. A similar conference sponsored by the NCW at the same time remained mute on the subject.

[24] "Ecos del congreso del libre pensamiento," *La Prensa,* 7 October 1906; Fenia Chetcoff de Repetto, "El movimiento socialista femenino de la republica argentina," *Almanaque del Trabajo*, 1918, p. 141; "Publicaciones Recibidas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 18 (June 1905) 32-3. For a summary of the pre-Perón feminist groups, see María del Carmen Feijoo, "El movimiento feminista," *Todo Es Historia,* 1978.

sexes but also those who believed that women required special protection. That is, we may include more radical ideologies of gender, such as proponents of free love, as well as also those who believed that women's traditional roles needed to be promoted and protected. This definition recognizes that women cannot be regarded as a homogenous group and that individual women may have widely divergent notions of what was in their own best interests. In this way, we may distinguish those who were in favor of suffrage and related projects from those who wished to maintain the political status quo.

The use of the terms "suffragists" and "peronistas" will help distinguish the two generations of feminists in Argentina. The former will be used to refer to women who were active in the women's rights movement prior to the rise of Perón in 1943. These women, it should be remembered, were not always in agreement with one another regarding tactics or priorities. However, as a group they tended to have broadly similar goals and backgrounds. As mentioned above, the suffragists largely hailed from middle or upper class families, were well educated (many earned degrees in law or medicine), and most often were affiliated with the Socialist party or other left-wing groups. Their policies tended to be reformist, covering a variety of social issues. The vote, for them, was designed to enhance the ability of women to address those policies that affected them the most, such as childcare, public health, and education.

Given the divisions within the suffragist camp, we shall also use terms to distinguish them according to their ideological and organizational background. We shall refer to four groups most frequently. Conservative feminists, such as Alvina Van Praet de Sala and the members of the National Council of Women, tended to resist what they saw as radical feminism, and included many who at one time or another opposed suffrage. These women believed that women's role as mothers needed to be protected and encouraged, and rejected any innovation (including suffrage) that they felt threatened that role, which they felt was

fundamental to female nature. Socialist feminists include all those affiliated with the Socialist party. These suffragists included women's voting rights in the package of reforms the party advocated. While important, the vote did not necessarily constitute the primary goal of the Socialist feminists, who saw it as a means to advance the cause of the party rather than as an end in itself. The Radical Feminists, led by Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, were affiliated with the Unión Cívica Radical or Radical party. As with the Socialist feminists, these suffragists placed the vote in the context of a wider package of reforms. Finally, there are the Independent Feminists led by Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw. Organized in the National Feminist Party, these suffragists were perhaps the most devoted advocates of women's political rights. Lanteri's election campaigns during the 1910's and 20's served the purpose of focusing attention on the issue of women's suffrage, although Lanteri included other reforms in her platform. None of these strains of feminism disputed the importance of motherhood to women's nature or to the wellbeing of society. On the contrary, they lauded motherhood as a noble and indispensable calling. However, Socialist, Radical and Independent feminists felt that changes to women's roles in society were inevitable and beneficial. Therefore, women had to be prepared to adjust to an evolving society and to shape that evolution. For this reason, leftist feminists embraced a more assertive political stance than the Conservative feminists.

A fifth group of feminists that cannot be ignored are the anarchists, who held a distinct attitude towards politics. The anarchist movement contained a wide variety of ideas and priorities, which complicate any effort to present a general picture of their attitudes towards women's rights and roles within society. Nevertheless, most anarchists seemed to recognize that women were oppressed in modern society and loudly denounced bourgeois attitudes towards women's work, education, and sexuality. Many anarchists seemed to believe that these conditions would disappear once the anarchist revolution had materialized-

therefore, focusing on women's rights in the present was unnecessary, and even a dangerous distraction. Others took on a distinctly paternalistic view, feeling women needed male supervision if they were to be of any help at all. On a more mundane level, members of anarchist unions saw female labor as detrimental to their interests, and displayed overt hostility to feminism in any form.

Women within the anarchist movement, however, were hardly silent. The first women's political newspaper in the country, *La Voz de la Mujer*, was an anarchist publication, and women contributed regularly (if often anonymously) to other anarchist publications. These women denounced fellow anarchists who opposed women's rights as hypocrites and sounded off on a variety of issues related to women and the movement. Whatever their view on women's rights, both male and female anarchists displayed either indifference or antagonism towards suffrage and the strains of feminism described above. Electoral democracy, they argued, was an inherently flawed institution, and women everywhere would be better served destroying the system, rather than seeking to participate in it. While they certainly may be included among the feminists in most respects, therefore, the anarchists must also be listed among the staunch opponents of the "reformist" suffragists.[25]

Less ambiguous opposition to suffrage came from the Catholic Church and certain affiliated politicians and writers. Firm believers in separate spheres of activity for men and women, these opponents nevertheless sponsored organizations that allowed for female activity in the public sphere. The Church, for example, had close ties to the Sociedad de Beneficencia and by extension to the National Council of Women. Women were also active in many of the most

[25] María del Carmen Feijoó, ed. *La Voz de la Mujer: periódico comunista-anarquicó* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997). This is an edited volume containing all the editions of the paper which came out in 1896-7. For more on anarchist feminists see Maxine Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) and Juan Suriano, *Anarquistas: cultura y política libertaria en Buenos Aires, 1890-1910* (Buenos Aires: Monumental, 2001).

conservative organizations of the day, including the Liga Patriótica, an archconservative entity that attacked labor unions and leftists. Furthermore, women's roles as teachers received considerable support from all ideological groups, which many considered to be a natural extension of the maternal ideal. Nevertheless, the church and the conservatives used arguments of biology and morality to oppose what they saw as the feminist threat to social order.

While suffragists were not always united in their efforts in favor of women's rights, they universally rejected the presidency of Juan Perón. They argued that he, and by extension his policies, were illegitimate, and anything he did on behalf of women would therefore do more harm than good. Many women, especially in the working class, who had previously avoided politics, however, embraced Peronism, and these women came together to support his administration.[26] Evita assumed the leadership of these Peronistas, eventually organizing them into the Partido Peronista Femenina in 1949. Through the Peronist press, Evita took charge of the suffrage campaign and put forward her own vision of women's role in society as wives and mothers first and foremost (a role that she herself seemed to violate at times). Among the Peronistas, particularly after the creation of the Peronist Women's Party, Evita's leadership mitigated conflict between competing Peronist women's groups. Following her death in 1952, however, a contest for power ensued. Nevertheless, the continued electoral success of the PPF under Perón allowed the Peronistas to thrive as their members took on leadership roles in Congress.

By using these terms, my intention is to explore and explain the differences among those women who were most active in the drive for women's suffrage in Argentina. In doing so, I rely on the current feminist historiography represented principally by the works of Joan Scott and Asunción Lavrin. In many

[26] Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

ways, these scholars simply reiterate a point that by now is familiar to most historians- beware of making assumptions about your subject and do not assume that because an event happened that it was bound to happen. In the context of the history of women and gender, these caveats remind us that women do not necessarily share the same interests. This is crucial not only for our own analysis, but for understanding why the subjects of our research may have made some of the choices that they did. As we shall see, Argentine feminists throughout the period in question often make broad statements about the nature of womanhood. Such a perspective may have made it difficult for feminists of that era to come to terms with actions that seemed to contradict their depictions of femininity. For our purposes, a brief review of Scott, Lavrin, and likeminded scholars will provide some perspective on these issues.

In her essay on experience, Joan Scott challenges the use of the term "experience" as a given term. In her view, have used the word "experience" to define particular identities- racial, cultural, social, and so on. This usage, she feels, has led to assumptions that these categories of identity have always existed or had a particular meaning and always will. In contrast, she argues that "subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy." In other words, a given subject has some control over the identity that describes it, but that agency is limited by the circumstances in which the subject is placed. Such a perspective presents a balance between a deterministic view of the world that places history at the mercy of abstract forces and the even older view that history is the story of prominent individuals.[27]

Asunción Lavrin has highlighted many of the critical issue that historians must address when discussing women's history. She notes that "Historians have

[27] Joan W. Scott, "Experience", in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33-4.

been more sensitive to the significance of class and race than that of sex in Latin America. They have not considered to what degree women share attitudes and problems owing to their nature."[28] While acknowledging that all women faced obstacles due to their sex, Lavrin points out that race and class clearly made a difference in their daily lives and expectations, a difference that could supercede gender. Writing in that study, Cynthia Little demonstrates how lack of awareness of these differences may have limited the early suffragists. In her essay, she argues that Argentine feminists "failed to create a solid front by integrating women from all classes into their movement", a lapse made worse by their exaggerated faith in legal reforms to effect social change. By emphasizing women's moral qualities and domestic virtues, Little continues, these feminists reinforced the unequal division between the sexes.[29] While early feminists in Argentina certainly had limited success in gaining widespread public support, the criticism of their tactics merits some revision. One must bear in mind that in order to win the reforms they desired, feminists had to convince those who had the power to grant them that doing so would not unduly disrupt society. One could just as reasonably say that any challenge to women's political role in society inevitably brings the social status of women into question. Politics and social mores are not easily separated.

In her more recent studies of suffrage movements of Latin America, Lavrin explicitly describes the concepts of femininity that limited men and women alike in the early twentieth century. In this view, intellectuals and politicians understood womanhood to be both socially and biologically defined. Because traditional views of femininity described it as inherent in women, social activity

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[28] Asunción Lavrin, "Introduction" in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives"* ed. Asuncion Lavrin (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1978), 17.

[29] Cynthia Little, "Education, Philanthropy, and Feminism: Components of Argentine Womanhood, 1860-1926" in Lavrin, *Ibid.*

should not "hinder the development of femininity. Lack of femininity ran against nature." This suggests that the seeming reluctance of some women described by Little to push a feminist agenda was not due to naivete, but rather to an inability to conceive of a more radical vision of society. To put it in Scott's terms, the options available to these historical actors was limited by the circumstances they faced. Lavrin is more generous in her assessment of early suffragists as well. While acknowledging that "women's votes did not change the Latin American political landscape" and that much work remains to be done, the suffrage campaigns "marked a transition into public life nothing short of spectacular." In other words, suffrage was a necessary, if small, first step for greater equality between men and women.[30] As such, it merits further study. However, Lavrin also observes that "the social reality" of Argentina "was far from reflecting the arguments already being made by male and female intellectuals and labor leaders." Understanding this divergence that Lavrin identifies is critical for any study of the women's rights movement in the nation.[31]

The concepts developed in part by Lavrin and Scott appear in the most recent scholarship as well. In her comparative study of women's movements in Latin America, Maxine Molyneux seeks to emphasize those movements that in her opinion lack sufficient examination in contemporary scholarship. In particular, she examines gender issues in communist Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua. However, she also reviews a series of feminist articles published in the Argentine Anarchist press of the late nineteenth century. In doing so, she demonstrates that feminist movements were by no means limited to the reformist middle class

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[30] Asunción Lavrin, "Suffrage in South America: Arguing a Difficult Cause" in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* eds. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland Auckland University Press,1994), 196.

[31] Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 256.

alone.[32] Despite her focus on alternative forms of feminism, Molyneux nevertheless makes many points that echo those of other scholars of feminism. For example, she recognizes the link between feminist movements and existing political institutions, be they parties or government agencies. While often adversarial, such relationships highlight the need for feminist movements to engage the male power structure in order to achieve their ends.[33] Molyneux also problematizes the idea of "Women's interests". First, she distinguishes between "practical" interests defined by women's role in the sexual division of labor. Then, she describes "strategic" interests as those relating to women's ability to alter social and gender relations. She also seeks a balance between women's "subjective" and "objective" interests.[34] Assuming such a division can be made, this latter distinction allows us to recognize the different goals of women's movements, from those seeking protection for women's special maternal role in society, to those seeking total equality with men.

Another important perspective on women's movements in an international perspective comes from Patricia Ward D'Itri. D'Itri identifies three important phases of the feminist movement in her work. First came the creation of a feminist consciousness, an awareness of the need to create a movement, among the leaders themselves. Second, feminists had to address male resistance "as women's determination reflected a self-imposed moral obligation to oppose social injustices such as slavery." Finally feminists had to organize in political societies to break down the notion of separate spheres for men and women. Each of

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[32] Molyneux, *Women's Movements….,*13-37.

[33] *Ibid.* 3.

[34] *Ibid.* 152-4.

these phases appears in Argentina, forming the basis for women's civil and political equality.[35]

Apart from Lavrin's work, few authors have addressed the suffrage issue in Argentina directly. Many biographies of prominent Latin American feminists exist, but these works naturally focus on only one aspect of the movement rather than the movement as a whole.[36] Furthermore, those studies that do address Argentine suffrage tend to focus on the final stage of that campaign- that is, on the peronistas. While these works may refer to earlier feminist campaigns, they do so only briefly as a way to provide a backdrop for the efforts of Evita and the Peronist Women's Party. Such is the case with the works of Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchís and of Estela dos Santos. While their portrayals of the operation of the Partido Peronista Femenino and their interviews with its members are invaluable, they provide only part of the whole story.[37] A more complete depiction of the Argentine feminist movement can be found in María del Carmen Feijoó's article for *Todo Es Historia*, which outlines the creation and activities of each of the major feminist groups.[38] An article, however, can only begin to reveal the complexities of such a diverse movement and place it in international context.

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[35] Patricia Ward D'ltri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848-1948* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999) 3.

[36] Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto, and Diego L. Arguindeguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina,* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001); Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); John Barnes, *Evita, First Lady: A Biography of Eva Perón* (New York: Grove Press, 1978); J.M Taylor, *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Paul L. Montgomery, *Eva, Evta: The Life and Death of Eva Perón,* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979).

[37] Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de America Latina, 1984); Estela dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1983).

[38] María del Carmen Feijoó, "Las luchas feministas," *Todo Es Historia,* 128, January 1978.

Finally, Marifran Carlson's history of the Argentine women's movement provides a useful outline of the history, but little analytical investigation into the subject.[39]

As these scholars suggest, the feminist movement in Argentina formed a part of a broader campaign for women's rights around the world. Feminists in one country often relied on the successes of feminists in other nations for moral support and inspiration. A brief overview of these movements will help place Argentina in context. It should be noted also that we are concerned principally with when a particular nation (or province) gave women unrestricted access to the polls- that is, suffrage unlimited by qualifications of property, race, or education. Many nations enacted suffrage laws with these limitations in place, often keeping them for decades (i.e., the Jim Crow laws of the southern U.S. or apartheid in South Africa). Such distinctions merit their own study, but since the Argentine law granted women the vote on the same conditions as men, who had enjoyed universal suffrage since 1912, we will only address this issue in passing here.

The earliest successes for suffrage came from the Anglo world- particularly the western United States, New Zealand and Australia. Women in the Wyoming territory won the right to vote in 1869. Over the next 36 years, numerous territories, states, and provinces throughout the anglophone world followed suit, but the first nation to grant suffrage to all women was New Zealand in 1893. There a prolonged and well-organized suffrage campaign, primarily headed by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, convinced parliament to enact the suffrage law. Within the next 15 years, the provinces of Australia had each passed suffrage laws, with white women gaining the vote across the nation in 1902 (it would be another sixty years before aboriginal women won the same

[39] Marifran Carlson, *¡Feminismo! The Women's Movement in Argentina from its Beginnings to Eva Perón* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1988).

rights). During the same period, the U.S. states of Colorado, Idaho, and Utah all enacted similar legislation. These locations, all with predominantly male, rural populations, suggests the practical, rather than philosophical, reasoning behind suffrage laws. Where women had a substantial economic role on the frontier, their ability to advocate their rights had greater impact. The importance of the Temperance Union and similar organizations is also critical. While not organized for the purpose of expanding women's political role, temperance and other reform societies served both as grassroots organizations for female activism as well as examples of the ways in which women conceived of, and acted for, their interests.[40]

For the United States and most of Europe, suffrage became a reality between the two world wars. Scandinavia led the way with Finland granting suffrage in 1906. The success of the suffragists in Europe varied widely. In Switzerland, for example, women did not win full voting rights until 1971. Spanish women won the vote in 1931, but Franco's government revoked their voting rights until his death in 1976. Not until 1984, with the enactment of the suffrage law in Liechtenstein, did all women in Europe have the vote. The period immediately following each of the world wars, in particular, seemed to be the most propitious moments for suffragists to achieve their ends. The massive entrance of women into war industries during these conflicts provided tangible proof, to those who required it, that women were capable of extraordinary action in defense of their homes. While this reasoning reinforced traditional domestic notions to an extent, upholding domestic virtue also became one of the most convincing and oft repeated arguments made by feminists worldwide.[41] Having

[40] For many women, temperance represented a way to curb male vices and thus protect the family.

[41] Victoria Ocampo, "La mujer y el voto," *La Vanguardia,* 11 September 1945; "El voto a las mujeres," *La Vanguardia,* 11 June, 1921.

access to the resources of the more powerful nations of the day, suffragists in the U.S. and Europe also had a great influence on similar movements elsewhere. Argentine suffragists, as we shall see, made use of the tactics, ideas, and arguments developed in the more "advanced" parts of the world, adapting them to their own situation. Moreover, the very success of suffrage in the U.S. and Britain in particular served as proof of the value of suffrage in a nation that had often looked to these countries as models of progress.

In Latin America, as we shall discuss below, there was a significant coincidence of suffrage laws and times of upheaval. Women's suffrage often followed on the heels of dramatic regime changes. In Brazil and Uruguay, the first nations in the region to adopt universal female suffrage, voting rights came into place following the overthrow of traditional liberal regimes in favor of the populist administrations that prevailed between 1930 and 1960. For most of Latin America, Argentina included, suffrage came during or shortly after the Second World War. Paraguay in 1958 was the last to allow women political participation- this may have had more to do with the political upheaval that plagued the nation until that time than with any particular obstinance in this matter, however. In Latin America, too, global conflict seemed to focus attention on certain domestic issues, making broader political participation more acceptable.

Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, for the most part, faced an additional obstacle to female political participation compared with Europe and the Americas. Women could not vote in these countries for the obvious reason that many of these nations were colonies until after World War II. There were a handful, such as Thailand and Mongolia, that granted suffrage prior to 1939. For most of these nations, however, the vote came with independence in the 1950's and 60's, by which time the idea of women's suffrage had gained widespread acceptance. A few notable cases should be mentioned. Both China and Japan gave women the

right to vote following World War II- China in 1949 (following the Communist Revolution), Japan in 1945 (as part of the post-war constitution).[42] In South Africa, white women gained the vote in 1930, making it the first African nation to enact a suffrage law. However, it was not until 1994 and the collapse of the apartheid system that all South African women gained such rights- thus making South Africa both first and last in this regard for the continent. The story of suffrage for Asia, and even more so for Africa, is little studied, and we may hope that the growing interest in the global dimensions of suffrage and feminist movements will take them in as well.

This study will give an overview of the women's suffrage movement from its earliest stages through the passage of the 1947 law, and conclude with a look at the Partido Peronista Femenino and its importance as a regulator of female political activity. In chapter II, we will explore women's rights in Argentina prior to 1910 in order to get a sense of the obstacles feminists faced. We shall discuss the laws that constrained women and examine the careers of some of the first suffragists. We shall also look at those opposed to suffrage and feminist goals, and the first efforts of Argentine feminists to organize nationally and internationally. In the following chapters, we will examine these groups as they evolved and the projects they undertook prior to Perón's rise. In Chapter III, we will look at the suffrage groups themselves- how they were formed, what obstacles they faced, and how they changed over time. Chapter IV takes in the campaign for legal changes for women, with special attention to the reform of the Civil Code and the passage of the San Juan suffrage law. Chapters V through VII review other feminist projects such as education reform, workplace reform, social reform (including alcohol prohibition, anti-prostitution, criminal reform, and

[42] Patricia Ward D'Itri, Fusae Ichikawa and the Japanese Woman Suffrage Movement," in *Cross Currents….*, 170-181.

public health campaigns), and changes within the "domestic sphere." Finally, in Chapter VIII and IX, we will discuss the peronistas. Chapter VIII examines Perón's rise to power, Evita's efforts towards suffrage, and the passage of the voting law itself. Chapter IX will address the political projects of the Peronistas after 1947 until Perón's removal in 1955, focusing particularly on the activities of the Peronist Women's Party.

As we examine the various projects of the feminists, we will suggest possible explanations for the timing of suffrage and the rationales for political activism by various groups of women. These suggestions, naturally, are designed to promote discussion and point the way towards viable interpretations of this material. It would be presumptuous, to say the least, to assert that these ideas provide the definitive analysis for female activism in Argentina, much less the world. Nevertheless, there are three areas that merit special attention as a way to inaugurate a more complete and in-depth examination of the feminist movement in this particular country, a work that no other scholar has attempted.

First, we must consider the role of class in establishing a basis for women in politics. As indicated above, division between women has become a focus of recent feminist scholarship. By highlighting class, I do not mean to suggest that it is inherently more important as a category or descriptive term than any other (such as race or religion)- quite the contrary. However, it is the case that the opportunities for women to enter the "public sphere" of politics appears to follow upon their entrance into the "public sphere" of work. As noted above, the most vocal suffragists were almost all educated professionals. Their efforts, furthermore, coincided with the growth of an urban, industrial workforce that included many women (in some industries, women actually made up the majority of the workforce). This development became a point of critical importance to the feminists, one they used to demand both the vote and other reforms. Furthermore, as I have suggested above, class became the critical dividing point

between the suffragists and the Peronistas. Evita made use of class to distinguish herself (and her husband) from her opponents, a strategy that successfully built upon the suffragists' inability to generate a large popular following despite decades of campaigning. This does not necessarily mean that class division prevented successful feminist campaigns, but rather that a common identity among women as women is crucial for such movements. In other words, feminism simultaneously recognizes and transcends divisions when it succeeds as an agent of change. Peronism achieved this condition when it successfully brought working class women under its banner.

This emphasis on class distinction suggests another interpretation that may apply to many, if not all, Latin American nations. Perón serves as one of the foremost examples of a populist leader. Populism, a term with widely varying connotations depending on the nation and politician in question, generally denotes a mass political movement headed by a charismatic leader. Latin American populists of the mid-twentieth century base their rule on a broad-ranging coalition that usually placed organized labor at the center in alliance with the middle class and the army. In order to reinforce themselves, populists attempted to bring in as many allies as possible. By this reasoning, it appears logical that such regimes would grant women the right to vote, thereby doubling (at least in theory) their support base. Such an interpretation seems to be born out by the coincidence of the timing of suffrage laws with the early stages of populist regimes. The Argentine law came within a year of Perón's election, and the suffrage laws of Brazil, Cuba, and Chile, to name a few examples, followed a similar pattern. Populism, itself made possible by working-class male political participation, appears to have paved the way for wider female political activity. Yet it also reinforced the patriarchal nature of the State, placing political leadership in the hands of men while keeping women in a supportive role, even as voters and officeholders.

Not all Latin American nations experienced similar developments, however. In Mexico, for example, true national suffrage did not become a reality for women until well after the populist presidency of Lazaro Cárdenas. Other nations, such as Uruguay and Ecuador, granted the vote on the eve of dramatic regime changes. This suggests a factor that may help explain the timing of suffrage not only in Latin America but for other nations as well. Coming as it did in times of transition or crisis, such as the overthrow of the Old Republic in Brazil suffrage may well have appeared as a means for promoting stability within a particular regime. That is, an administration seeking legitimacy or a more conservative voting base (many felt that women were in fact more conservative than men) would extend women the vote in order to shore up their hold on power. This interpretation takes into account the populist story I described above, while also positing an explanation for those nations that gave women the right to vote in a different context. Further research will help clarify these possibilities.

In 1900, Argentina's first formal women's political organization took shape. Forty-seven years later, the populist regime of Juan Perón fulfilled one of the crucial goals of early feminism- women's suffrage. Despite the strong arguments in favor of voting rights, it took feminists five decades to achieve this goal. While early feminists enjoyed excellent opportunities in education and demonstrated skill in organization and political activism, they ultimately failed to reach a sufficient portion of the population to make their goal of political rights a reality. Only Perón was able to provide an ideology and a political structure that could bring together women from across the nation and make them political actors.

Chapter II
The Origins of the Argentine Suffrage Movement, 1900-1910

> It is she that sustains the family morally…the woman, in many cases in life stimulates the man to undertake acts of heroism, for good or ill. She sends her husband, her children to war, she sends her children to church and by her influence they achieve any number of things.
>
> -M. Bronstau[43]

> Our work of regeneration must begin now and we that march at the forefront must be united in it. We need not demean our grand mission by wasting precious time in useless polemics…we must, before resolutely marching ahead, wait for the immense army of women that lag behind to follow us and offer those that make up our vast foundation the chance to continue on the path with us.
>
> -Emma C. de Bedogni[44]

For much of the nineteenth century, the women of Argentina faced considerable obstacles to participation in the political life of the nation. The constitutions that shaped the political system of the nation, while adapted to the "modern" way of thinking, left them with little opportunity to engage in political action. Nor did the colonial heritage of the nation seem to provide any precedent to engage in government. Yet the changes experienced in Argentina in the second half of the century did indeed pave the way for women to engage in the public realm. As the nation gradually emerged into the international market and immigrants from Europe flowed into the country, the effort to modernize brought with it new opportunities for women. Expanded educational opportunities touched men and women alike, and the resulting professional class included a

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[43] M. Bronstau "La mujer en la propaganda socialista," *La Vanguardia*, 16 February 1901.

[44] Emma C. de Bedogni, "Obras y reformas sociales," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 9:32, December 1908, p. 34-5.

number of exceptional women that questioned the old models of female submission. This combination of new ideology and an elite class of women leaders allowed feminism to flourish in Argentina at the turn of the century.

In addition to the appearance of individual feminists, political organizations formed with the potential for female activism. The Unión Cívica Radical, the Socialist party and the Anarchists all included women as they took shape in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Women in the Radical party provided a support role for the organization's activities beginning with the initial uprising of 1890, but the party did not make women's legal rights a formal part of its platform until the 1930s.[45] The Socialists, on the other hand, included women's suffrage in its program from the outset, and Socialist feminists actively participated in the life of the party. Anarchists, by definition, lacked definitive organization, relying on a variety of clubs and unions to advance its agenda. A women's group contributed to this heterodox voice, representing in its own way the first true women's political group in the nation. However, anarchists generally did not concern themselves with political rights- at least, not in a system they viewed as irredeemably corrupt. The feminism they advocated came within a context of popular revolution designed to destroy the existing system. The suffrage movement, by definition, was reformist, seeking women's inclusion within the political system with the aim of bringing needed reforms to the nation.[46] Only when women's organizations dedicated to political reforms began to appear in the first decade of the twentieth century does the feminist movement appear as a political, as opposed to revolutionary, phenomenon in Argentina.

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[45] Carlos Abeijón and Jorge Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina antes y después de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Cuartomundo, 1975), 63-4; "Hoy se proclamara la formula presidencial de la Unión Cívica Radical," *La Argentina*, 28 September 1931.

[46] Carmen S. de Pandolfini, "Leyes referentes a la mujer y a los niños," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 7:31, September 1908, p. 28; José Ingenieros, "El feminismo ante el criterio sociológico," *La Vanguardia*, 5 August 1899.

Although certain political parties created the first opportunity for female political participation, the first feminist group to appear did not affiliate with any of them. Indeed, its members had far more in common with the dominant party, the Partido Autonomista Nacional. This conservative affiliation gave the women of this organization a "respectable" cast that allowed it to function and a means to promote certain ideas. However, the impetus for the creation of the group, the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres, came from one of the educated feminists of the nineteenth century, Dr. Cecilia Grierson. It was her independent streak that led to the creation of the Consejo following a meeting of the International Council of Women in London in 1899. Upon her return to Argentina, she set about creating a local chapter of that international organization, hoping to spread its message throughout Argentina and beyond.

The circumstances that led to the creation of the Consejo in Argentina reflected the overall strategy of feminism in the first decade of the twentieth century, shaping the movement for the next fifty years. The Consejo aimed to bring together women of every category into its membership, soliciting the affiliation of all women's organizations nationwide. The international connection between the Consejo and the International Council of Women also guided Argentine feminism, and suffragists looked abroad for ideas and inspiration in their own efforts. This inclusiveness had its basis in the belief that all women shared common goals and interests, and that they were endowed with a unique moral voice that would purify politics. These goals, the Conservative feminists believed, could be achieved through collective action. However, the very existence of alternative political ideologies belied this optimistic appraisal. Within five years of the creation of the Consejo, Socialist and Radical feminists had each created their own feminist organizations. Finally, in 1910 the Consejo splintered as Cecilia Grierson departed the organization that she had helped to create.

In spite of the early fragmentation of the feminist movement, by the beginning of the 1910's the cause of women's rights also showed signs of progress. The growing number of women's political groups demonstrated an increased interest in politics among women despite the multiplicity of viewpoints. This interest in and of itself represented a powerful argument in favor of suffrage and political rights in a society that considered women unfit for and uninterested in the public sphere. Furthermore, male feminists, most notably Socialist Alfredo Palacios, had entered Congress. These male allies began to bring forward projects designed to enhance women's rights, placing them on an equal legal basis with men. This political access allowed the feminist argument to make itself heard on a national stage. Feminists also made themselves increasingly visible through a growing number of publications, charitable organizations and conferences. All of these activities served to highlight the abilities and strong moral qualities of women.

These positive advances encouraged feminists to continue their activities, but serious obstacles remained. The male allies of feminists in Congress were very much a minority, and the majority of Argentine congressmen habitually ignored pro-women legislation. Lack of voting rights also affected men at this time, and women's voting rights could not be considered seriously until that changed. For example, men were not entitled to a secret ballot, facilitating electoral fraud. Furthermore, women lacked other legal rights according to the Civil Code, and for many feminists the reform of the code had to come first. Feminism itself was a fairly new concept in Argentina and required a great deal of explanation in order to mitigate the fears it could arouse. Men often looked at feminism as a threat to the "natural" order. The possibility of female political rights brought into question every aspect of the relationship between men and women. It is no coincidence that the suffrage movement came at a time when women entered the workforce in increasing numbers, bringing into doubt the

family structure that had prevailed until that time. Feminists had to address these issues in order to win men over to their cause. To do so, feminists of almost every ideology constantly reiterated the moral and domestic role of women, making clear that they only sought legal equality, not a shake up in the traditional social order. In making this argument, feminists put forward a seeming contradiction. On the one hand, they argued that women, as wives and mothers, possessed an inherently moral quality that would change the nation for the better. On the other hand, they reassured men that the vote would not change the basic nature of male/female relations, that women knew their place was in the home and did not seek to change that role. The ability to make this argument required considerable flexibility on the part of feminists, but they did succeed in gradually winning over the powerful men who would decide the fate of suffrage.

The contradictions inherent in the suffragist argument, as well as the schism within the feminist movement, may help explain one of its most serious shortcomings- the lack of working class female participation. Feminists in the early twentieth century were, almost without exception, middle or upper class women with access to education and political influence. While some, especially the Socialist feminists, recognized the need for working class women to support their cause, the numbers of such women to join the movement appeared to be small. Feminist divisions prevented them from offering a coherent message to working women, and their class differences may have made their ability to appeal to these women more difficult in any case. Moreover, they would have faced considerable hostility from working class men, who tended to view women workers as unwelcome competitors in the labor market. It did not help matters that most men did not enjoy full voting rights until the 1912 reform law that

provided for truly universal male suffrage.[47] Working class men therefore would have viewed with suspicion any effort to organize their female counterparts politically. While feminists did work to protect female laborers and mitigate their competitiveness with men, their efforts to win political rights focused on the men in charge of government. This helped provide the justification for suffrage, but failed to generate the needed momentum to guarantee action on voting and other legal rights.

Women's Rights and Feminism in the nineteenth Century

Women's organizations as such had existed in Argentina well before the advent of suffrage feminism. Like the other colonies of Latin America, Argentina had its share of convents. These centers of female religious provided the only opportunity for women to earn an education and engage in commercial activity outside of marriage. However, the independence movement of the 1810's brought with it a strain of anti-clericalism, and the resulting governments sought ways to curtail, or even eliminate, the role of the Church in the social, political and economic life of the nation. As a result, the government of Bernardino Rivadavia sponsored the creation of the first secular women's organization in the nation, the Sociedad de Beneficencia, in 1823. Rivadavia expressed confidence in the abilities of women to improve society, noting that all great men benefited from the guidance of capable women.[48] He empowered the Sociedad to take on many of the services provided by the convents, particularly in the realm of female

[47] Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, ed. *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 9; Vera Pichel, *Mi país y sus mujeres* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Patria, 1990), 37.

[48] Bernardo Irigoyen, *Origen y desenvolvimiento de la Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital, 1823-1904* (Buenos Aires: Guillermo Kraft, 1905), 24-5.

education. Over the century, the Sociedad spread out from Buenos Aires, establishing chapters in all of the provinces. These chapters funded schools for girls and operated hospitals, orphanages, and "all public establishments directed towards the good of individuals of that sex."[49] Catholic charities continued to operate throughout the nation and other secular charities, often associated with a particular immigrant community, developed over the course of the century. Nevertheless, the Sociedad remained the principle means for women, most especially women of means, to participate in matters outside of their homes. This made the Sociedad a subject of both acclamation and condemnation. The Sociedad's supporters praised it as a herald of "civilization" during a formative period in Argentina's history, bringing learning and culture to the population and to women especially. In the twentieth century, in contrast, feminists came to see the Sociedad as bound by tradition, "closed to all ideas of social renovation" and an obstacle to progress in women's rights.[50] Regardless of the particular point of view, the Sociedad and other, smaller charitable organizations remained the only secular form of women's organization until 1900. These organizations relied greatly on government support, and also influenced government policy on health and education.[51]

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[49] Marcela Durriea, *Se dice de nosotras* (Buenos Aires: Catáloga Editora, 1999), 75; Enrique Frutos Ortiz, *La mujer en la medicina argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones AM 1990), 37-8; Manuela Suárez de Figueroa, "Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:4, December 1901, p.39.

[50] Domingo Sarmiento, *Educación popular* (Buenos Aires: Banco de la Provincia Córdoba, 1985), 167; Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buneos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 168. Ironically, one of Moreau's critiques of the Sociedad was the influence of the Church- an opinion not unique to her. See Karen Mead, "Gendering the Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 77:4, November 1997, p. 645-75

[51] Frutos, *La mujer en la medicina argentina* 84-5; Gustavo Parra, *Antimodernidad y trabajo social: origenes e expansión del trabajo social argentino* (Lujan: Universidad Nacional de Lujan, 1999), 115-7.

The appeal of charities as an activity may have proved especially valuable for women who could not, legally, seek gainful employment without the permission of their husbands. According to the Civil Code of 1870, husbands enjoyed many of the same rights over their wives that fathers held over under-aged daughters. This meant that husbands controlled all of the property belonging to their wives prior to marriage and anything she might earn afterwards. In addition, wives could not work or testify in court without the authorization of their husbands. The civil code even obliged married women to live with their husbands unless they could prove in court that their own life was in danger. Otherwise, husbands could "request the necessary judicial measures and [had] the right to deny her maintenance" in order to force her return- the reverse did not apply to delinquent husbands.[52] Unmarried or widowed women could manage their own affairs, but generally found it difficult to do so. Married couples also could not break off a marriage in the fullest sense. Under extreme conditions, they could apply for legal separation, though not the right to remarry. In any case, women always bore the burden of proof in demonstrating mistreatment, and tended to receive harsher judgements in cases of her infidelity because "she introduces children into the family that don't belong to it."[53] Clearly, the authors of the code sought to limit women's legal rights.

Obstacles to women's ability to function in the public realm had a solid foundation both in Argentine jurisprudence and in its social mores. The code originated in French and Spanish legal tradition, emphasizing the power of male heads of households. In his 1898 commentary on the code, José Gustavino

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[52] José M. Gustavino, *Notas del Código Civil Argentino*, t. 2 (Buenos Aires: Félix Lajoune, 1898),120-5, 130; Asuncion Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 194-5.

[53] Gustavino, *Notas*, 116.

revealed the philosophical basis not only for the legal subjection of women, but the social perception of women's inferiority as well:

> The family is a true organism because it is a society. In it, the husband is the head that directs and decides all business, because the marital power resides in him, [as does] power over the children, the administration of the goods of the wife and of the conjugal union. The law gives the chief of the family supreme direction of the internal and external goals and administration of the business of the family without restriction. In this state of affairs it imposes the incapacity of the woman, because her meddling in these matters without the awareness and authorization of her husband, *would bring anarchy into that direction, prejudice the financial interests and subject the harmony between spouses to a dangerous test.* In addition, *nature assigns men and women special missions within the family:* to him is given the supreme direction, representation, and external business; to her, the life of the home, its internal direction and the raising and education of the children…her incapacity, while a limitation in the organization of the family, *is a protection of her interests*.[54]

In nineteenth century Argentina, women had a clear role in the maintenance and care of the home. Within the domestic sphere, she theoretically enjoyed tremendous power to influence the life of the family, and there, in the words of Juan Bautista Alberdi, she "completes her most noble mission." However, that power clearly did not extend to the public, "external" world of the husband, who possessed the authority to oversee and overrule her domestic rule as he saw fit.[55] As the feminist movement advanced in the twentieth centuries, this notion of

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[54] Gustavino, *Notas*, 132-3 (my emphasis).

[55] Alberdi asserted that "the best work of art and culture that a woman can make is a dress." Liliana Caraballo, Noemi T. Charlier and Liliana Garulli, eds. , *Documentos de la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Eudebea, 1998), 51. In this chapter I use the term "domestic sphere" in the sense suggested in Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

separate spheres for men and women proved to be central to its strategy in building the case for women's rights.

Both in the short and long term, the legal "incapacities" of women represented the principle challenge for most advocates of women's rights. So long as the civil code curtailed the ability of women to participate in matters "external" to the family, they could not expect their claims for other reform to be taken seriously. This legal arrangement meant, in the words of a Socialist commentator, that "the national Congress recognized the administrative capacity of women, voting prodigious sums every year for the ladies of the Sociedad de Beneficencia" and its projects while denying married women the right to manage their own affairs.[56] Given these limitations on women's rights, many feminists in the early twentieth century made the reform of the civil code the focus of their political efforts, giving it priority over suffrage. Even during the nineteenth century, legal commentators observed that "it is not possible to grant [women] political rights before conceding the use of all the rights that should make her fit for civil life." Without the correction of these "old errors", voting rights held no meaning.[57] While these critiques of the civil code reveal the existence of feminist thought in nineteenth century Argentina, organized effort towards the rectification of women's inequality did not easily coalesce.

Until the very end of the nineteenth century, Argentina possessed active feminists but not feminist organizations. These individuals, like Abigail Adams in the United States or Mary Wolstonecraft in England, had strong connections to the upper echelons of society and helped to introduce the basic notions of

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[56] Nicolas Repetto, *Como orientar el voto de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: Unión de Mujeres Socialistas, 1948), 6-7.

[57] Santiago Vaca Guzman, *La mujer ante la lei; la política y el matrimonio* (Buenos Aires: Pablo E. Coni, 1882), 10-11; See also Angel Ossorio, *Cartas a una muchacha sobre temas de derecho civil* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jurídicos Europa-América, 1957), 173. The letter in this case was written in 1925.

feminism. Such women also paved the way for other women to enter public life. Juana Manso (1819-75), for example, published numerous articles and stories on the subject of women's emancipation, and established an experimental co-educational school in 1859. She co-operated closely with president Domingo Sarmiento in his efforts to improve and expand education throughout the nation, helping to promote the increasing presence of women in the teaching profession.[58] Juana Manuel Gorriti (1816-1892) also wrote numerous articles and works of fiction, and served as publisher of a literary journal that acquired an international reputation.[59] Through their literary contributions and personal connections to powerful politicians, these women set a precedent for future activity. However, in the short term they focused primarily on improvements in education, a subject that fit well with the priorities of contemporary governments.[60] While these women did make efforts to spread ideas of increased female rights, their publications rarely lasted long enough to make a deep impression.[61] Nevertheless, these early, individual feminists helped pave the way for later feminist leaders and organizations.

Building on the work of Manso and Gorriti, feminists Cecilia Grierson(1859-1934) and Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane(1867-1954), the first two women ever to receive medical degrees in Argentina, combined their professional careers with considerable political activism. Both helped to organize important feminist political groups, but it was Rawson that established the first

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[58] Jim Levy, *Juana Manso: Argentine Feminist* (Bundoora, Victoria: La Trobe University, 1977), 5.

[59] Lily Sosa de Newton, *Diccionario biográfico de mujeres argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra 1986), 286-7.

[60] Lilianan Ferraro, "Una Argentina y dos categorias de mujer," in Martha Susana Párano, ed. *Erase una vez la mujer* (Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 1995), 33-4.

[61] Nestor Tomás Auza, *Periodismo y femenismo en la Argentina, 1830-1930* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1988), 9-17.

association between feminism and a political party. In 1890, the city of Buenos Aires erupted in chaos as the Unión Cívica attempted to overthrow the government. Rawson, still a medical student at the time, oversaw the care of injured rebels. Over time, she committed to the support of the intransigent branch of the Unión Cívica Radical, better known as the radical party. Other women contributed to the growth of the Radical party as well during its early years as an opposition organization. One of the most notable of these, Eufrasia Cabral, enunciated a vision of female political activism that in many ways defined feminist discourse in Argentina throughout the early twentieth century:

> The woman of our homeland should make herself the priestess of liberty, inculcating the sense of deep morality in the home. She must understand that we are in a period of human evolution, and as such her personality should not remain wrapped up, as in the past, in the obscurity of mundane courtesy. Her conduct should adapt to the present ideal, comply with the supreme destiny that will transform societies…[She should] aspire to the good of the homeland and not be the splendid courtesan of the salon; and reign over morality and virtue and embody the high and intimate sense of the sacred in the family…We find in the Argentine woman the first dawn of our independence. Proud of her dignity, she voluntarily accepted the sacrifice of defending the homeland, in the sublime silence of the home, teaching her children the pure religion of custom…on her depends the possibility of constituting free societies, founded in bond of work and honor. On her depends the moral honor of nations.[62]

Here we see critical elements of the feminist argument in Argentina- women possessed an inherently moral and traditional character, yet also held the potential to transform the nation into a land guided by "virtue" and "honor".

[62] *La Nación*, 11 August 1890. Cited in Edit Rosalia Gallo, *Las mujeres en el radicalismo argentino*, 1890-1991 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 2001), 21.

In contrast to these Radical feminists, Grierson, the first female doctor in Argentina, maintained distance from the formal party structure, but it was she who would organize the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres in 1900. Her career in many ways set the standard for later feminists. She entered teacher training in 1872, graduated from medical school in 1889, and created a national first aid society three years later.[63] According to Grierson, attention to the issues of women always focused her energies. "The conditions of my sex," she wrote in her doctoral thesis, "have placed me in close relations with the Women's Hospital." There, "dedicated by a debt of conscience to the illnesses of women," she eventually took charge of the gynecology ward. In a revealing passage, she expressed "gratitude for my teachers, fellow students and friends; each and every one have shown me the attention and devotion that only a brother could provide."[64] In short, Grierson denied that she faced any sexual discrimination in the course of her studies.

While other women presented a less positive picture of gender relations in the medical school, Grierson's warm acknowledgement suggests an explanation for the strong connection between the medical profession and the early feminist leaders. A welcoming environment could only encourage young women seeking a path to a larger world beyond the confines of the home. Grierson's flurry of activity following her graduation from medical school seemed to confirm this interpretation. She worked for a variety of social service and government agencies, including children's judicial services and the Red Cross. During trips to Europe for further medical research, she made contacts that led to the creation of an Institute for the Blind, an act that also provided her with the contacts that

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[63] Alfredo G. Kohn Loncaria, *Cecilia Grierson: vida y obra de la primera medica argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Stillogra, 1976), 21-2.

[64] Reproduced in Kohn Loncaria, *Cecilia Grierson…,* 41-2.

eventually led to her invitation to the International Council of Women conference in 1899.[65] In this way she demonstrated both a devotion to education and public service, characteristics that matched well with the vision of moral strength and reformism that Eufrasia Cabral outlined. That both Rawson and Grierson had entered a previously all-male profession demonstrated their extraordinary personal qualities and established a connection between the medical profession and feminism that persisted well into the twentieth century.

Although Elvira Rawson made a personal connection with the Radical Party, the Socialists claimed the honor of being the first political party to formally declare itself in favor of women's rights. Its declaration of principles, originally published in 1894, included a demand for "Universal suffrage without distinction between the two sexes."[66] In doing so, the Socialist party could later lay claim to the credit for first advancing women's political rights. As the final law made its way through the Senate in 1946, for example, Socialists reminded women that "it is our group that first worked for the sanction of women's suffrage" and that the party had a long history of providing women with opportunities to participate in its activities.[67] However, in the 1890's Socialists appealed to women based on broad calls to resist the "social order that permits a few the tranquility of wealth and condemns the rest to a life of privation and anguish" rather than specifically address sexism.[68] Not until the twentieth century did the Party create organizations by and for women, leaving the issue of male dominance unexamined.

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[65] Kohn Loncaria, *Cecilia Grierson…,* 45.

[66] "Declaración de principios del partido Socialista de Argentina," *La Vanguardia*, 2 January 1904.

[67] "La mujer tiene su puesto de lucha en el partido socialista," *La Vanguardia,* 27 August 1946 (supplement).

[68] Emilia Alconi Marahon, "Propaganda a la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 28 January 1899.

In 1896, a group of anarchist women presented the first organized challenge to male dominance in public life. Through the publication *La Voz de la Mujer*, these anarchists provided a glimpse of the most radical objections to gender relations in Argentina. "Frustrated with so much misery and tears…fed up with supplication and petitions, with being the object of pleasure to our infamous exploiters or vile spouses," the editors wrote in the first volume, "we have decided to lift our voice in the social concert and demand…our share of the pleasures in life's banquet."[69] The editors of this short-lived newspaper attempted to carve out a unique voice for women in the diverse stream of anarchist thought. As Maxine Molyneux points out in her study of *La Voz*, anarchists in Argentina published a tremendous array of journals, newsletters and pamphlets.[70] These publications, in turn, at times revealed a frankly hostile attitude towards female activism in any public sphere. In some instances, male anarchists viewed equality between the sexes as one of the effects of a successful revolution, and therefore ignored feminism. Others saw women as a threat to male employment in industry, chastising women for providing capitalists with another means to oppress the worker. Anarchist women responded with the argument that the support of revolution and feminism were not only compatible, but inseparable. They labeled as "false anarchists" those that failed to "comprehend once and for all that our mission is not reduced to raising your children and washing your clothes, that we too have a right to emancipate ourselves and to be free of all types of tutelage, be it social, economic, or

[69] *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:1, 8 January 1896. Reproduced in Maria Carmen Feijoó, ed. *La voz de la mujer: periódico comunista anárquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997), 43.

[70] Maxine Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2001), 17-8.

marital."[71] However, *La Voz* did not last long enough to make a deep impression on political discourse within working class communities. Nevertheless, they did add one more point of view at a time of social ferment in the nation brought on by economic and demographic growth.

The influx of foreign peoples, money, and ideas had a definite impact on the growth of Argentine feminism. An interesting link between many of the early feminists is their immigrant origin. Many were either immigrants or the daughters of immigrants, though that was by no means always the case. Foreign ideologies also had an important influence on these women as they searched for means to promote and articulate their ideas. Early feminists such as Mary Wolsotnecraft, Jane Addams, Olympes Gouges and John Stuart Mill all found receptive audiences among Argentina's feminists. In her analysis of the feminist movement, for example, Elvira López noted that "in terms of character and morality, Mill did not admit to feminine inferiority, but rather was inclined to consider it superior."[72] Such judgements reinforced the opinions Cabral had expressed and that many feminists later repeated. Advocates could also point to the success of suffrage movements in the "advanced" nations of Europe and North America in order to underscore the argument that women's suffrage served an important role in advancing modernity.[73] Argentine feminists therefore kept careful watch over these foreign successes, and the opportunity to create a link

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[71] *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:2, 31 January 1896. Reproduced in Maria Carmen Feijoó, ed. *La Voz de la Mujer: Periódico comunista anárquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997), 57.

[72] Elvira V. López, *El movimiento femenino* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1901), 56-7. See Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 50.

[73] For early examples, see "El feminismo en los Estados Unidos," *La Vanguardia*, 18 February 1899; "El feminismo en los Estados Unidos," *La Vanguardia*, 25 February 1899; "El feminismo en Francia," *La Vanguardia*, 1 April 1899; "El feminismo en Francia," *La Vanguardia*, 8 April 1899.

between their own activities and those of the International Council of Women appeared eminently logical.

Individual women made important contributions to the advancement of feminism through personal improvement and public action. As members of respectable professions, such as education and medicine, and participation in political parties, women initiated the campaign for female political rights. These women, many of them of immigrant origin, found opportunities for education and employment that would not have existed for them in the previous generation. In embracing these opportunities, women in Argentina opened the possibility for greater advancement. Ultimately, these opportunities required organization among women to make them real. Individual action could only accomplish so much, and in order to demonstrate the fitness of women for political activity, feminists had to provide concrete examples of political skill. In order to achieve that organization, in 1900 Cecilia Grierson gathered a diverse group of women together into a chapter of an international feminist organization.

The Consejo Nacional de Mujeres

In 1899, Cecilia Grierson traveled to London in order to participate in the International Council of Women (ICW) conference. The ICW, the brainchild of prominent American and English feminists, already included chapters throughout Europe and North America as well as Australia and New Zealand, the first two nations to extend women the vote.[74] In 1899, the organizers had taken the next

[74] New Zealand adopted suffrage in 1893, Australia in 1902 although certain states preceded the federal law. For New Zealand see Patricia Grimshaw, "Women's Suffrage in New Zealand Revisited: Writing from the Margins" and Raewyn Dalziel, "Presenting the Enfanchisement of New Zealand Women Abroad"; For Australia see Susan Magarey, "Why Didn't They Want to be Members of Parliament?" and Ann Curthoys, "Citizenship, Race, and Gender: Changing Debates

step in making the ICW truly international, inviting representatives from Latin America, Africa and Asia. These representatives all received the honorary title of Vice President and returned to their homelands with an invitation to create local chapters. Grierson, having contributed to an earlier report to the ICW on the status of women in South America, joined seventeen other "fraternal" delegates to the convention.[75] Grierson ultimately proved to be one of the most enthusiastic recipients of the ICW message.

The basic philosophy of the International Council of Women assumed and promoted a universal sense of womanhood that transcended class, race, or political orientation. Prominent feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard created the ICW in 1888 in order to bring together women's groups of every kind into one union. Women's suffrage served as the original focus of the Council, though the inclusion of "all associations of women in the trades, professions and moral reforms, as well as those advocating the political emancipation of women" almost guaranteed a wider spectrum of activity.[76] Although the ICW later had its own divisions over where its priorities should lie, the initial spirit of inclusiveness contributed to its appeal and facilitated the efforts of its organizers to create chapters around the world.

Cecilia Grierson set about the creation of the Argentine National Council of Women with the same philosophy of inclusion as the ICW. The Sociedad de

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Over the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of Women" in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds. , *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

[75] Cecilia Grierson, "Marcha progresiva de la idea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 2:8, December 1902, 26-7.

[76] Patricia Ward D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement: 1848-1948* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press 1999), 69-71; Margaret H. McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 172-6.

Beneficencia, the largest women's organization of any kind in the nation, seemed a logical starting point for such an effort. Grierson approached the president of the Society, Alvina Van Praet de Sala, and convinced her of the potential benefits of an amalgamated union of women's groups. From there, Grierson approached women from a broad spectrum of political orientation, including Rawson and socialist Sara Justo.[77] The original Council thus included feminists of every ideological orientation apart from anarchism. This unity, obviously fragile from its inception, nevertheless created a unique opportunity to test women both as political organizers and as the morally superior beings that early feminist theorists proclaimed them to be. Nevertheless, the leadership of the Consejo lay chiefly with the "distinguished group of ladies that took on the task of accompanying [Grierson] in the campaign of creating this association." While Grierson herself became vice-president of the Council, Alvina Van Praet de Sala, an active officer in the Sociedada de Beneficencia became president, and it was she that hosted the first meeting of the Council at her home on September 25, 1900.[78]

While the decision to make Van Praet the leader of the Council may have come as a surprise given Grierson's instrumental role in initiating the organization in the first place, the choice of president proved politically sound. The very idea of a national women's organization provoked a strong negative reaction in the nation. According to the Council's official history "some people attributed anti-religious ideas to it without bothering to glance at its constitution; others were alarmed just from hearing the word 'feminism'; and the newspapers, also without

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[77] *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:19, September 1905, p.2, 37-41. Sara Justo's brother, Juan, was the founder of Argentina's Socialist Party.

[78] "Consejo Nacional de Mujeres de la República Argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:2, July 1901, p.2; "Informe del Consejo Nacional al incorporarse al internacional," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3, September 1901, p.18; Sosa de Newton, *Diccionario Biográfico…*, 654.

studying the fundamental principle, misrepresented the idea, and the word 'emancipation' caught the public eye."[79] "The idea" as Van Praet saw it meant a moral crusade, though not necessarily a political one. According to her:

> The National Council of Women has the glory of having disseminated to many parts of the world the great moral gifts that adorn our sex, which stand out in such sharp relief in this union that we agree to form on a base as solid as we hope it shall be enduring, a union so warmly shared with other nationalities, which through women distribute their beneficent and humanitarian influence over this land…[80]

Though this may not have been Grierson's aim for the Council, she nevertheless understood that Van Praet's support had made the Council possible. In a letter to the ICW, Grierson explained that despite her prestige, Van Praet still had to "struggle valiantly…against many exaggerated tendencies, sometimes liberal fanaticism, sometimes religious fanaticism." In addition, Van Praet had to "hear, advise, guide, make explanations to, and convince thousands who expressed their doubts, fears, projects, etc." and slowly but surely address their concerns. In short, Grierson declared that Van Praet's leadership, and her "name and authority" had made the Council a success.[81]

The Council's creation brought together a wide assortment of women's organizations. This diversity reflected Van Praet and Grieron's vision for the

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[79] "Informe del Consejo Nacional al incorporarse al internacional," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3, September 1901, p.18.

[80] "Acta de la tercera asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:4, December 1901, p.20.

[81] Cecilia Grierson, "Marcha progresiva de la idea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:8, December 1902, p. 26; Acta de la tercera asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:4, December 1901, p.20; "Informe del Consejo Nacional al incorporarse al internacional," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3, September 1901, p.18-9.

Council, and guaranteed that the nascent organization would take on a variety of tasks. At the same time, the varied nature of these groups may have contributed to the later division of the group as the membership began to fracture. Unsurprisingly, the Sociedad de Beneficencia provided a considerable portion of the membership through its various provincial chapters. Catholic charities and other social aid foundations made up the rest of the membership. These included religious societies such as the "Damas de Caridad" and "Hermanas de los Pobres"; immigrant societies such as "Le Donne Italiane" and the "Sociedad de Señoras Alemanas"; educational societies such as the "Sociedad Internacional de Kindergarten"; mutual aid societies such as the "Sociedad Femenil Cosmopolita de Socorros Mutuos"; and medical societies- particularly those connected to Grierson such as the Sociedad Argentina de Primeros Auxilios. In all, 64 different organizations joined the Council in its formative period.[82] Each of these groups contributed its own perspective on what the Council should achieve, and all of them had an opportunity to make their case. Meetings of the Council usually included lectures on a variety of subjects. In the first year of its existence, lecture topics included culture, education, and women in the work place. The Council also became a forum for the discussion of foreign affairs. As a result, two of the earliest actions that the Council took were a petition to King Edward to provide better treatment for female prisoners in the Boer War and a letter to the Argentine Congress calling for a "maternal protection law."[83] These first steps into politics represented the true beginnings of political feminism in Argentina- a united front putting forward a definite agenda. Although voting rights

[82] "Sociedades Incorporadas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 4:13, March 1904: 2 and 35-7.

[83] "Copia del informe elevada al Conesjo Nacional de Mujeres, por el sub-comité de la prensa y propaganda," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:4, December 1901, 29-30; Alvina Van Praet de Sala, "Informe anual del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres de la República Argentina (abril de 1901 á abril de 1902)," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Meujeres*, 2:6, June 1902, p.24.

had not yet come forward as a stated goal of this movement, the very existence of the movement illuminated that possibility. Otherwise, the difficulties facing Grierson and Van Praet would not have been so great.

The opposition to the organization of women took many forms and varied in intensity, but always held to the notion that women had no place in public discourse. In some cases, critics of feminism felt that a women's movement had no purpose. "Demagoguery," wrote Santiago Vaca Guzmán in 1882, has "tricked the multitude into believing that the weaker half of the human race goes around with a yoke on its neck, subject to the whim of the stronger half."[84] This argument placed men and women as separate but equal in the grand scheme of things, making female political activism not only unnecessary, but also counterproductive. By the twentieth century these objections came in much stronger terms. One commentator framed these objections in particularly revealing language:

> The woman hides herself in the protective shadow of the home, and from there, among her children, she reigns as a queen and exerts her unlimited influence over the man, who for love of her struggles vigorously, imbued with faith…when we read that women abandon this path in order to engage in male actions, when she invades an area that should be forever veiled to her heart, we felt indignation and pain because her exotic attitude has separated her from the serene atmosphere in which her life formed.[85]

In short, women did themselves harm when they sought to move beyond the "protective shadow" of the home, and society had to resist feminism in order to protect women from themselves.

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[84] Santiago Vaca Guzmán, *La mujer ant la lei*, *la política*, *y el matrimonio* (Buenos Aires: Pablo E. Coni, 1882),. 14.

[85] Juna de la Campa, "Feminismo," *Tribuna*, 29 October 1906.

Objections such as these might not have been as powerful or as difficult to overcome if men alone voiced them. Women, too, raised objections to activities of "radical" feminists, comparing them to neglectful mothers- inhuman and isolated from their place in society.[86] Such female critics proved most troublesome to the organizers of the Council, who recognized that "woman has never had a more malignant or unjust critic than the critic with a skirt, who demonstrates such sweetness and subservience to men (with a few exceptions), demonstrates such unheard of valor when attacking those that work for her own redemption."[87] These opinions reveal the extent to which earlier notions of women's place in the world had taken hold in the Argentine population. Feminists had to convince both men and women of the rightness and importance of their cause.

In order to continue combating the objections raised to feminist organization, the Council had to promote its message and disseminate news of its activities as much as possible. Its periodical, the *Revista de Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, served as the principle means towards this end. The magazine featured regular reports of the standing committees and the meetings of the Council, as well as transcripts of lectures and correspondence with government agencies or with the International Council of Women, as well as records of the membership and leadership.[88] This combination allowed the Council to provide a record of its activities- proving that their feminism was not of the "radical" kind so feared by the critics- as well as an opportunity to air the opinion and arguments that would help to justify their case for female activity. "Politics has never swayed

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[86] Emma C. de Bedogni, "Obras y reformas sociales," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8:32, December 1908, 35-6.

[87] "Informe de la doctora Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 4:17, March 1905, p. 16.

[88] *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 4:13, March 1904.

women [in this country]" one Council member assured her audience, "because the life of the home, with all of its tenderness, is irresistibly attractive."[89] Officially, the Council portrayed political activity as a necessary evil, one that enhanced, but did not alter, women's domestic essence.

In order to perpetuate the idea that women could operate publicly, and even politically, the Council extended the charity work that its constituent organizations already provided. Charity provided good publicity for the member organizations as well as the Council itself. These activities came in forms as varied as the constituent groups themselves, and met with equally varied responses. For example, Van Praet petitioned the Ministry of Justice to allow the Council to participate in visits to the women's prison in order to bring "comfort and regeneration to these poor disgraced ones." "Who better than women", Van Praet wrote, "to bring council, who better to discourage these unfortunates as much as possible from recommitting their errors?" Ultimately, the Ministry politely declined the request, preferring to limit visits to the Sisters of Charity. Other activities met with more success, such as the conferences of child care that the Council sponsored, or the creation of a library committee to send books and educational material to the interior of the country. The Council magazine also reported on the efforts of affiliated groups in combating prostitution (which was legal at that time), providing shelter for orphans and working women, combating various diseases, and educating women in technical skills. All of these activities came to represent common projects for feminists across the ideological spectrum, often coloring their political priorities.[90] In time, the meetings of the

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[89] Carolina T. Bottino, "La misión de la mujer argentina en la historia patria," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:16, December 1904.

[90] Alvina Van Praet de Sala, "Copia de una solicitud," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 4:13, March 1904, p. 5; "Segunda conferencia de las madres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 6:23, September 1906, p. 21-5; "Acta de la Asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 9:32, December 1908, p. 10; Rosario Puebla

Council received coverage in the nation's newspapers in much the same way as any other charitable organization.[91] In this way, the Council overcame the most vehement objections to its existence, but also paved the way for controversy among its own ranks.

Many of the most active members of the Council embraced the role that the organizations had created for itself, but women both in and out of its ranks began to question whether or not that role was sufficient. For conservative women, charity work represented the pinnacle of social activism, one that was uniquely female. For Rosario Puebla de Godoy, charity "emanated from the love of God." Women played an essential role in organizing charity, in her opinion, because men were often "impeded by their own egoism from recognizing the worth of the work they do." Emilia Salza injected a note of nationalist pride into the subject of women's accomplishments, noting that, while women had always "eased the pain of those that suffer" in Argentina, "the educational and charitable work of women is more noticeable" than in any other nation.[92] But for other feminists, charities did more harm than good for all concerned. Such attitudes existed before the creation of the Council, to be sure. The anarchists of *la Voz de la Mujer* put their opinions on the matter in very clear terms: "We hate charity because it denigrates and insults us and is a horrendous sarcasm…we will take

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de Godoy, "La filantropía," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 9:33-4, June 1909, p. 22-3; "Informe de la Sociedad Madres Argentinas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 7:24, December 1906, p. 31-6; "Informe sobre el trabajo hecho en beneficio de la mujer en la República Argentina durante el año 1905," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 6:22, June 1906, p.19-20; Maria de Vega, "Sociedad Margherrita de Savoia," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:2, July 1901, p.17.

[91] "Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Tribuna*, 5 November 1906; *El Diario*, 5 November 1906.

[92] Rosario Puebla de Godoy, "La filantropía," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 9:33-4, June 1909, p. 22-3; Emilia M. Salza, "La acción educadora de la mujer en la Argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 3:12, December 1903: 22.

what we need."[93] Prominent socialist Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto condemned charity in an equally strident, if more nuanced, fashion. She claimed that those who practiced charity did so to buy the subservience of the recipients. "If women wish to truly fix our problems," she wrote, "they should dedicate their time and energy to the true betterment of the working class, in the sense that that class *earn more and work less.'*[94] These critiques highlighted the limitations of Grierson's vision- not all women agreed on what needed to be done. So long as women outside of the Council made such harsh critiques, the goal of a unified feminist movement could not be achieved. The creation of new women's political organizations outside of the Council, as well as differences of priorities within it, would eventually fracture the labors of Grierson and Van Praet. However, the precedent that the Council set made the creation of organized political effort by and for women a viable option, one that helped to set the stage for the first efforts to alter Argentine laws restricting women's rights.

Socialist Feminism

At the turn of the century, Argentina's dominant political party faced a considerable challenge from political groups oriented towards the middle and working class. While the Radical party continued to challenge the traditional party structure from without, the Socialist party began to integrate itself into the electoral system, challenging it from within. In 1904, Alfredo Palacios, a prominent Socialist who would remain a fixture of Argentine politics for the next

[93] *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:4, 27 March1896. Reproduced in Maria Carmen Feijoó, ed. *La Voz de la Mujer: periódico comunista anárquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997,), 89.

[94] Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, "Oh! La filantropía," *La Vanguardia*, 19 April 1904. Emphasis in the original.

three decades, won election to the House of Deputies. He set about introducing the Socialist legislative agenda to Congress, including its women's rights reforms. Most of these reforms did not pass until the 1920's, by which time the Radicals had overcome the Partido Autonomista Nacional monopoly of power that had existed since the 1870s. Palacios' very presence in the Congress, along with the example of the Council, provided socialist feminists with ample incentive to form their own political organizations in order to support and influence the Party. Formal socialist women's organization preceded his election and coincided with the earliest attempts to reform women's rights. This created a strong association between feminism and socialism in Argentina that persisted into the 1940's.

In 1902, as Palacios prepared for his career in national politics, the Centro Socilista Femenina (Socialist Women's Center) opened. The Center, according to co-founder Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, did not suffer from "any class prejudice," or "fill its existence solely with the labors of the workplace and home." Instead, with a "clear and well-defined program" the Center "expands its horizons with the fertile work of the economic, political, and social emancipation of the proletarian class, and therefore of women as well."[95] The Center thus made Socialism and Feminism aspects of the same movement- a position that would not fit that of the National Council of Women. In spite of this difference of opinion, much of the work of the Center resembled that of the more conservative Council. For example, the Center created facilities to instruct mothers in modern child care and hygiene, and petitioned Congress on issues such as the limitation of alcohol sales and the right to divorce. However, they also conducted activities that stood out from the more traditional tasks of the Council. The socialist feminists "went to the tenements, factories, and workshops and with an innocent spirit have studied those conditions under which women and children work."

[95] Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, "El movimiento socialista femenino en la República Argentina," *Almanaque de Trabajo*, 1918, p. 141.

These studies contributed to later workplace reforms and also led the Center to lend support to strike activities. In this way, the Socialists aimed to build working class support for feminist projects, and vice versa.[96]

The creation of the Socialist Women's Center helped to inject the party with a vitality that it sorely needed in the first decade of the twentieth century. With the creation of the Center, wrote one socialist commentator, the party received a "new impulse" to be imitated "by the multitude of workers who remain unorganized and resigned to their fate."[97] This depiction of workers as "resigned" came at a critical moment in Argentine history- the passage of the Residence Law, one of the first of a series of measures designed to contain worker activism. The law allowed the authorities to deport "all foreigners whose conduct compromises national security or disrupts public order."[98] In its application, the Residence Law served as a tool to remove those foreigners that had helped spread Marxist and anarchist ideology in the nation. The appearance of the Center therefore coincided with a moment of political crisis for the Socialist Party as it sought to work against, or around, the new law. Their response differed greatly from that of the anarchists, who chose a more confrontational strategy to make their case heard.

The Center's appearance contributed to the candidacy and election of Alfredo Palacios to the Chamber of Deputies in 1904 and to the overall political strategy of the Socialists. The Socialist Party, by integrating itself into the

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[96] Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, "El movimiento socialista femenino en la República Argentina," *Almanaque de Trabajo*, 1918, p. 142-5; Alfredo Palacios, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1907*, v. 1, 27 May 1907, p. 26-7.

[97] Raquel Messina, "La mujer y el socialismo," *La Vanguardia*, 31 May 1902; "Centro Socialista Femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 10 April 1902.

[98] República Argentina, *Leyes Nacionales años 1901-1903* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Senado, 1908), 190.

political system, sought change from within and immediate improvements in the lives of the working class- both male and female.[99] Anarchists, in contrast, sought a revolutionary change. In 1902, anarchist unions prepared for a general strike that would initiate the desired uprising of the working class and overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Socialists favored a slower pace, arguing that without organization and "unity of thought" they would achieve nothing. In the long run, this division led to a split between anarchists and socialists in the labor movement, and the actions of the anarchists factored heavily in the passage of the Residence Law.[100]

The division between Socialists and Anarchists affected their organization of women as well. Both tended to support the notion of equality between the sexes, at least in principle. Anarchists portrayed feminism as a component of their overall philosophy and agenda, calling for the "restitution to women of the fullness and integrity of their rights equal to- or better yet, equivalent- to those of men." They noted with pleasure that women "share the aspirations of liberty and support the proletarian cause" with their "mentality of perseverance, the goodness of the bright eyes and the grace of their smiling lips."[101] Such sentiments, while indicative of an acceptance of the idea of feminism, also demonstrates a tendency to view women's equality as a distant goal, subordinate to the greater "proletarian cause." Given that the Anarchists had no political agenda in the electoral or legislative sense, this attitude is understandable- all would be resolved after the Revolution. In the meantime, women in the anarchist

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[99] Mirta Lobato, "Entre la protección y la exclusión: Discurso maternal y protección de la mujer obrera, 1890-1931," in Juan Suizo, ed. *La cuestión social en Argentina, 1890-1943* (Buenos Aires: La Colmena, 2000), 254.

[100] "La huelga general favorece a los patronos," *La Vanguardia,* 19 October 1901; "Los socialistas en el movimiento gremial," *La Vanguardia*, 30 April 1920.

[101] "La mujer y la cuestión social," *La Protesta*, 6 December 1904.

movement acted in support of anarchist groups and unions, providing material aid during strikes and protests.[102]

The Socialist Women's Center provided similar services as the anarchist groups for their unions and political groups. Women participated actively in Socialist campaigns, contributing to Palacios's victory as they encouraged male voters to work for the "leveling of men into one social class."[103] The Center also organized special events such as concerts and children's festivals in order to boost morale within the party and improve its public image.[104] Furthermore, Socialist women, even more than anarchist women, contributed to Socialist publications and public discourse. The most prominent contributor in this regard was Alicia Moreau de Justo, who became one of the most visible figures in Argentine socialism in the twentieth century. Her career in most respects paralleled those of her contemporaries. She was of immigrant stock; enjoyed the full benefits of the expanded access to education women had begun to enjoy and had personal connections to prominent male politicians- not least of which were her teacher Hipolito Yrigoyen (future president and leader of the Radical Party) and her husband Juan Justo (founder of the Socialist Party).[105] These activities both reflected and reinforced the commitment of the Socialist Party to women's rights. Palacios, recognizing the importance of feminist activism in his party, advanced a project that would set the stage for broader inclusion of women in political issues- the reform of the Civil Code.

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[102] "Varias: Centro Anarquista Feminina," *La Protesta*, 27 February 1908.

[103] Juana M. Gómez de Regino, "A las mujeres," *La Vanguardia,* 11 August 1900.

[104] "El 1 de Mayo en Buenos Aires," *La Vanguardia*, 10 May 1902; "Centro Socialista Femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 9 January 1904; "Centro Socialista Femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 2 April 1904.

[105] Deleis, Monica, Ricardo de Titto, and Diego L. Arguindeguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001), 317-36.

The Civil Code, which limited the authority of women both in and out of the home, proved a serious impediment to women's rights and its reform served as the first challenge of would-be suffragists. Well before the beginning of the twentieth century feminist legal theorists asserted that "it is not possible to authorize political rights for them [women] before conceding the use of all the rights that would make them fit for civil life."[106] Feminists argued that the existing civil code, a relic of Argentina's colonial past, had to disappear before the nation could progress. The modern conditions of labor necessitated a change in the laws that restricted female employment. In any case, feminists could not tolerate a legal code that "literally makes married women equal to deaf-mutes and idiots." However, they also recognized that "reforms of this class are the hardest to make."[107] Civil Code reformers could count on resistance from those who felt that any change to the legal structure of the family heralded chaos and upheaval.[108]

Given the potential for resistance to Civil Code reform, the first project to make its way to congress called for relatively mild reforms. In 1902, deputy Luis Drago presented a bill that would more clearly define the boundaries between the property of the husband and that of the wife, as well as the concept of the pre-nuptial agreement. This proposal did not change limitations on the wife's ability to testify in court, work outside the home or make decisions regarding her children- ultimate authority in all of these matters would remain with the husband. Despite the tentative nature of this reform, Drago took the floor of Congress and defended his project using arguments that feminists had used in the past and

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[106] Vaca Guzmán, *La mujer ante la lei…,* 10.

[107] Elvira López, "Los derechos de la mujer," *La Vanguardia,* 3 November 1904; "La mujer en la Argentina: Costumbres, educación, profesiones a que se dedica, datos estadísticos, legislación, etc. ," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, June 1902, 36-7. The article was part of a serialization of López's doctoral dissertation.

[108] "El proyecto Drago," *La Voz de la Iglesia,* 20 June 1902.

would use again many times in the future. While marriage clearly represented "the communion of divine right and human rights with the pairing" that did not mean that the wife had to occupy "a completely subordinate and secondary position" or be left "defenseless in the use of her goods." Drago reinforced this philosophical assertion with extensive references to ancient history and to French, U.S, and British law in order to demonstrate that the proposed reform, rather than undermining the family, would instead reinforce it. Ultimately, these arguments did not win over his colleagues- the project disappeared in committee. It would be five years before Alfredo Palacios made a fresh attempt to enact Civil Code reform.[109]

In his 1907 project, Palacios put forward a much more comprehensive reform, as well as a more extensive argument in its favor. This bill set the standard for all future reforms of the code, including the version that finally passed into law in 1926. It removed all the legal impediments to married women working and owning property, allowed them to testify in court and equalized their legal power over their children with that of the father. In his speech on the project, Palacios reiterated some of the arguments Drago had made by using historical precedent and contemporary examples from other nations to prove the validity and necessity of reform. He added that women possessed the "moral capacity" to use these rights well, even if they still lacked political rights. Palacios also specifically rejected "declamatory and exaggerated feminism" that sought to establish "a perfect equality that the natural conditions of [women's] personality prevents." Instead, he merely wanted to correct the outdated and "irritating" inequalities contained in the Civil Code. In the process of making his case for reform, Palacios made the source of his arguments and his reform proposal

[109] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1902,* v. 1, p. 348-52; "Notas parlamentarias," *El País,* 21 June 1902.

clear- "this project was formulated by the feminist center."[110] In other words, the Socialist feminists had matched, if not surpassed, the National Council of Women in their ability to make their case heard in the halls of government. Although the Palacios project ultimately met the same fate as Drago's bill, the Socialist Women's Center had managed to raise their concerns in a new forum. However, this success did nothing to halt the fragmentation of the feminist movement along ideological lines. Indeed, by proving that women could make their voices heard in Congress outside of the Council or the Sociedad de Beneficencia, the Socialists may have demonstrated that women did not need to unite in a single entity.

The Free-Thinker's Congress and First Fragmentation of Feminism

As the Socialists began to increase their political presence and the National Council of Women expanded the sphere of its activity, other women's groups with a distinctly political character began to appear in Argentina. Some of these groups served as support committees or as lobbying groups within existing parties, much like the Socialist Women's Center and the Anarchist groups. Others avoided an explicitly partisan affiliation, seeking instead to unite women around their concern for specific issues, such as education. Over the remainder of the decade, the Council continued to put itself forward as the leading women's organization. However, the growth of other women's groups led to mutual competition that eventually brought about the breakdown of the Council and a fragmentation of the feminist movement. As a result, the future successes of the feminist movement came in spite of the lack of a unified voice.

[110] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1907*, v.1, p. 1168-1171.

At the time the Socialist Women's Center started to develop, the National Women's Council began to demonstrate a strongly conservative political attitude. In 1902, the Council registered a "debt of gratitude" to Dr. Manuel Carlés, the future founder of the ultra-right wing group called the Patriotic League. Carlés had assisted the Council in conveying its messages and requests to the Ministry of Justice and the Chamber of Deputies, reinforcing the Council's political voice.[111] Even more telling was Cecilia Grierson's response to a survey from the International Council of Women. In response to the question regarding female participation in political events, Grierson claimed that any woman could legally do so, but only women in the Socialist Party actually did. She later noted that public opinion in Argentina "is completely opposed" to women's public political activity. Finally, on the crucial issue of suffrage, Grierson claimed that "women do not have political rights, nor does it appear that they want them" in Argentina.[112] This skeptical appraisal of women's interest in politics, while not demonstrating hostility to the idea, clearly demonstrated that the Council did not consider the pursuit of women's legal rights to be a high priority. This attitude even came across in the Council's reaction to news from other International Council chapters. In 1903, the Council received an invitation from a U.S suffragist group asking for Grierson's support in promoting the suffrage agenda at the next ICW meeting in 1904. Ultimately, this invitation passed unanswered. However, in the notes on the invitation the secretary noted the possibility of opening a new "field of battle" for those that sought to "ennoble their sex" without resorting to the

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[111] "Actos de la quinta asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:8, December 1902, p. 11. See also "Acta de la septima asamblea del Consejo Nacional del Consejo de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 3:12, December 1903, p. 8.

[112] Cecilia Grierson, "Estudio relativo al estado civil de la mujer argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, June 1902, p. 29.

"evangelization of sex."[113] This suggests that there were those within the Council who did indeed wish to pursue the idea of women's suffrage, or at least a more assertive political strategy. That the official attitude of indifference overcame such interests undoubtedly contributed to the eventual separation of key groups and individuals from the Council, including Grierson herself.

The arrival of the invitation to participate in international pro-suffrage activism highlighted the possibility of a confrontation within the Council at the most basic level. The invitation, as well as much of the international correspondence directed to the Council, was specifically addressed to Grierson, even though Van Praet was the actual president of the Argentine Council. This oversight clearly irked Van Praet- so much so that she received a letter from ICW president May Wright Sewall apologizing for the unintended slight. Sewall assured Van Praet that the "carelessness" of those in the ICW that "met Dr. Grierson in London, doubtlessly supposing that she is still the representative of the Argentine Republic" led to the misdirected invitation.[114] No mention of this incident appeared again, suggesting that later correspondence carried the correct address. Nevertheless, that Van Praet raised the issue (and the record of it in the Council's official journal) strongly suggests the potential for a personality conflict between the two leaders of the organization. While this confrontation did not fully materialize for another seven years, it could not have made the intervening difficulties any easier to manage.

As mentioned above, the Council included women from a broad range of political allegiances. The inclusiveness of the Council reflected its goal of unity among women, but by the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century that

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[113] "Informe de la secretaria del exterior," *Revista del Conesjo Nacional de Mujeres*, 3:10, June 1903, p. 16.

[114] "Carta de la presidenta del Consejo Internacional de las Mujeres, May Wright Sewall," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres*, 3:12, December 1903, p. 12.

diversity began to fracture. Many of the most politically active members of the Council served on the Press and Propaganda Committee, which produced the Council's magazine. The Radical Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane presided over the committee with Sara Justo, a prominent Socialist, as treasurer. The López sisters, Elvira and Ernestina, served as the magazine's editors. These sisters had produced some of the most notable scholarship on feminism in Argentina at that point, and they shared the desire for a more active political role. In 1904, they attended the ICW meeting in Chicago, ostensibly to learn more about educational methods (a particular concern of Ernestina's) rather than to support the political agenda mentioned in the invitation addressed to Grierson. Nevertheless, they managed to make their own connections to the more politically minded members of the international organization, and their work on the magazine earned them high praise from the participants.[115] The follow-up to this meeting created the circumstances for the political activists in the Council to part ways with the more conservative leadership.

Shortly after their return from Chicago, the López sisters and other members of the Press and Propaganda Committee created a new organization, the Centro de Universitarias Argentinas. This organization, which joined the Council in 1905, made "the intimate union between women devoted to university studies" its reason for being. Ordinarily, the Universitarias would hold conferences and meetings in order to share the intellectual work and publications of its members, much as any other academic society. However, they also pledged to "lend moral support when the interests of a particular woman are damaged or her rights ignored." In short, this society of an elite and- at that time-

[115] "Carta de la Dra. Elvira López a la Dra. Grierson," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:17, March 1905, p. 13-14; *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 5; 19, September 1905, p. 1-2, 37; Sosa y Newton, *Diccionario Biográfico*, 361. Note that Elvira López directed her report on the Chicago conference to Grierson, not to Van Praet or to the Council.

very small group of women- reserved the right to participate politically and gave itself a broad criteria for defining women's issues.[116]

The Universitarias came to include nearly all of the best-educated women in the nation and consequently represented a powerful alternative to the leadership of the Council, the leaders of which had not necessarily participated in higher education. That Grierson not only joined but also became president of the Universitarias (a fitting role for the nation's first female doctor) simply underscored this challenge. On the other hand, the affiliation of the Universitarias with the Council demonstrated at least a temporary willingness to pursue unity. However, within a year of the new organization's creation, the first major split within the Council took place in a climate of increased feminist radicalism led by the Socialists and Anarchists.

In September 1906, a group of Socialists and Anarchists organized the "Free-Thinkers Congress", bringing together some 130 delegates from across the nation and the world. The Free-Thinkers Congress, which included Alicia Moreau and many of the Socialists who eventually served in the national Congress, provided a forum for the most radically progressive ideas of the day, including feminism. At the conference, some of the speakers "turned into interesting female-Quijotes of feminism" in their calls for absolute divorce and "female redemption" in terms of legal rights. While these ideas did not go unchallenged during the conference, reports in the mainstream press depicted the feminist speeches as "amazingly eloquent, deeply and convincingly thoughtful" with the power to "reveal false prejudices." The final resolutions of the Free-Thinkers Congress included a list of the most important left-wing feminist reforms, defining their agenda for years to come: absolute divorce, completely

[116] "Publicaciones recibidas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:18, June 1905, p. 32-3; Frutos, *La mujer en la medicina argentina* 88.

secular public education on an equal basis for males and females, and equality between men and women in the civil and political realms as well as in the workplace. The resolutions also supported the creation of feminist organizations, a suggestion that Alicia Moreau, for one, took to heart. Less than two weeks after the end of the Congress, she had presided over the inaugural meeting of a new "Feminist Center" that included many of the participants of the Free-Thinkers Congress.[117] Indeed, the new organization brought in several members of the National Women's Council, providing them with the outlet for political activism that they craved. The Free-Thinkers Congress and its coverage in the press demonstrated the increasingly public profile of feminism in Argentina and its increasingly political nature.

The formation of explicitly political organizations did not end with Socialists and Anarchists. Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane of the Radical Party cut her ties to the Council once and for all. Officially, the rationale for her departure was a difference of opinion over charitable donations and appointments to service committees.[118] However, the timing of her departure suggests that more was at stake than a simple personality conflict. Rawson's own involvement in the Free-Thinkers Congress and her political connections made her a stand-out among those that sought a more pro-active feminism within the Council. This also made her a potential challenger to Van Praet's leadership of the Council; therefore, she had to go. In any case, once she departed the Council, Rawson almost immediately found a new home as the head of the Feminist Center (later

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[117] "El Congreso del Librepesamiento: Inauguración de las sesiones, los primeros discursos," *La Prensa*, 21 September, 1906; "Congreso del Librepensamiento," *La Protesta*, 23 September 1906; "Congreso del librepensamiento, su última sesión," *La Prensa*, 24 September 1906 "Ecos del congreso del librepensamiento," *La Prensa*, 7 October 1906; María Abella de Ramírez, *Ensayos feministas* (Montevideo: Editorial El Siglo Ilustrado, 1965), 13-5. This book, originally published in 1906, contains a variety of essays inspired by the Free-Thinkers Congress.

[118] "Acta de la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 6:24, December 1906, p. 7-8.

renamed after Juana Manuel Gorriti) and thus drew off many of the more politically active members of the Council, such as Socialist Sara Justo.[119] However, not all of the activist faction bolted the older organization. Grierson and the López sisters still participated in the Council, and the Universitarias Argentinas remained an affiliated organization. Nevertheless, the stage was set for the final fragmentation of the Council's predominance.

The International Women's Congress

In the wake of the departure of Rawson and Justo, Van Praet acted to reassert her leadership over the National Women's Council. In doing so, she also made claims on the continued preeminence of the National Women's Council among feminist organizations. "The National Council of Women of the Argentine Republic," she wrote in 1907, "has maintained, up to now, a unalterable mission, having formed, as a result, soft yet strong bonds that cannot easily be broken, nurtured with the feelings of the heart and stimulated by common labors."[120] Despite the increased number of potential competitors and the division that had already taken place within the Council, Van Praet doggedly pursued the notion that the Council would remain the nexus of feminist activity in Argentina. Over the next three years, she reiterated this belief almost constantly. However, these assertions took on an increasingly desperate tone as Argentina neared its centenary celebrations. In 1910, the Council found itself excluded

[119] Deleis, De Titto and Arguindeguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina*, 322; "Acta de la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 6:24, December 1906, p. 2; "El feminismo en el país," *El Diario*, 7January 1919; Justa G. de Zalazar Pringles, "La mujer argentina ante el sufragio," *Anuario Socilista*, 1946, p. 167-8.

[120] Alvina Van Praet de Sala, "Informe annual," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8: 28, December 1907, p. 9.

from a major international conference that the Feminist Center and Universitarias Argentinas organized. That year, one of great turbulence for the nation as a whole due to a fresh surge of labor agitation, saw the final blow dealt to the vision of unity Grierson and Van Praet had brought to the Council as the two founders parted ways.

The controversy that led to the Council's division did not appear suddenly. In 1908, the Council's Press and Propaganda Committee began work on an international conference to celebrate the centennial of Argentine independence. At the same meeting, the Universitarias Argentinas, now the center for the more radical feminists still remaining in the Council, announced its own plans for a conference and requested the Council's support. While the Council turned down this request on the basis that the organization could not support two conferences with the same purpose at the same time, the Universitarias persisted with their plans.[121] Van Praet responded to this potential competition with intransigence. Given the move towards a more overtly political agenda, Van Praet reasserted her opposition to pursuing the vote and other changes in women's legal status. Responding to prompting from both activist members in the national Council and from international chapters, she argued that not only would a suffrage campaign be ineffective, but it would also be "counterproductive" to the Council's "well-founded reputation." In this way she reassured those conservative societies within the Council that apparently had "misunderstood" the Council's intentions. These groups, chiefly from the interior of the nation, had sent word that they were

[121] "Acta de la Sesión del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8:31, September 1908, p. 6-7. At this time, the president of the Universitarias was Emilia Salza, a former member of the Press and Propaganda Committee who, along with Grierson, took on a leading role in organizing the 1910 Conference. The original proposal for the Congress came from Julieta Lanteri, a doctor and former member of the Council who made a significant impact on public discourse on feminism and suffrage in the 1910's and 20's (see chapter 3). *Primer congreso femenino internacional de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: A. Ceppi, 1911), 7.

ready “to erase their names from the list of affiliated societies if the Council changed the direction that they thought it would take when they incorporated with the association.” The Council, she asserted “has not deviated from the principles that supported its foundation and it continues its forward march within the feminism that carried it back then…” This feminism, as she interpreted, it “elevates and dignifies the association whose moral and maternal influence grows greater day by day.”[122] Her claim of toeing the line as far as political advancement was concerned certainly rang true- Van Praet had indeed kept the Council to a more traditional focus on “moral” influence and social aid work, and her comments clearly reveal that many within the organization agreed wholeheartedly with that focus. Van Praet made it absolutely clear that she intended to maintain the support of those traditionalists at any cost.

Van Praet’s reassertion of the Conservative leanings of the Council seemed to spell the end for the possibility of progressive politics within the group. At the same meeting in which Van Praet renewed her claim to the leadership and direction of the Council, Emilia Salza, current president of the Universitarias, presented her resignation from the Council. She assured the membership that she took this action not out of any “personal motives” but rather due to “a question of ideals” and the need to devote herself more fully to the Universitarias and its upcoming conference. Van Praet accepted the resignation with good grace. However, when Salza left the Council, she took the group affiliation of the Universitarias with her. In the process, she removed the progressive wing of the Council. While individual associates of the Universitarias Argentinas- including Grierson and ex-Council member Rawson de Dellepiane- continued to work with

[122] “Acta de la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,” *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8:32, December 1908, p.6-7.

the Council, the possibility of a more forward-looking political agenda had now vanished from the oldest feminist group in the country, never to return.[123]

By the beginning of 1909, there were three major leftist feminist groups- the Universitarias Argentinas, the Centro Socialista Femenino, and the Centro Juana Manuel Gorriti- two of which had connections to major opposition political parties. These groups combined their efforts to organize the First International Women's Congress, to be held in May of 1910. In the process, this alliance formed the basis for progressive feminism in the next two decades. Members of the Socialist Center and Gorriti Center even collaborated on a new publication titled *Unión y Labor*. The editors of the magazine, which included former members of the Council's Press and Propaganda Committee, made their stance clear in their opening remarks:

> This will be a record of female progress in our country and abroad, so that the example of our confederates from across the sea may inspire us and give us the necessary strength to fully sustain the exalted banner of women's progress. This is because female progress is also progress in general, since we women form part of humanity.[124]

The writers of *Unión y Labor* reiterated their adherence to international feminism and the connection between female rights and modernity. They continued to argue that to "elevate women is to exalt the work of motherhood." However, with their own magazine, these feminists could now expound on the virtues of civil code reform and women's suffrage freely. As Sara Justo expressed it:

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[123] "Informe de la Secretaria del Interior," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8:32, December 1908, p. 15-16, 63; "Acta de la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 8:32, December 1908, p. 13.

[124] "Nuestro propositos," *Unión y Labor,* 1:1, 21 October 1909, p. 2.

> To be man's true companion is indeed a woman's ideal, but they can never be true companions where equality is non-existent. There can be no companionship between oppressor and oppressed, or between slave and master, and women, according to our codes, are only subjects that owe obedience to their spouses in all moments and circumstances, so that no matter what barbarities he may oblige her to do, before refusing him she must initiate a trial, ask a judge to intervene, etc.[125]

Women, another feminist argued, could provide fresh ideas and perspectives that would enhance civilization and culture- but only if the legal shackles restricting them came off.[126] While the magazine did not focus exclusively on women's civil and political rights, the greater publicity it added to these and other feminist issues clearly aided the cause of the Socialist and Radical feminists.[127]

The appearance of *Unión y Labor* coincided with a resurgence of political and labor activism in the nation. In 1909, Juan Antonio Argerich- who had joined Alfredo Palacios as a Socialist deputy- presented another attempt to reform the civil code. This effort died in committee, as before. Nonetheless, it did help to maintain awareness of women's issues.[128] However, as the centennial Independence Day approached in 1910 a new crisis took center stage as a new wave of strikes and labor unrest surged throughout the country. These reached such a state of intensity that the government declared a state of siege shortly

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[125] Sara Justo, "La mujer y la política," *Unión y Labor*, 1:4, 21 January 1910, p. 25.

[126] Carlos N. Vergana, "Derechos de la mujer," *Unión y Labor*, 1:5, 21 February 1910, p. 10

[127] Articles in the inaugural issue included several on education, literary criticism, a report on U.S feminists and accounts of the Universitarias Argentinas and the Club de Madres. Again, these subjects do not vary greatly from those of the Council's magazine or many earlier women's publications, though the editorial slant might. *Unión y Labor*, 1:1, 21 October 1909.

[128] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1909*, v.1, p. 442-3.

before the Women's Congress was to begin.[129] In spite of protests, the government cracked down on leftist organizations and publications (the Socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia,* for example, stopped publishing until August of that year).[130] By the time the state of siege ended, the National Congress had passed a new law, called the "Law of Social Defense". This law, in addition to further tightening the immigration policies laid out in the Residence Law, explicitly forbade anyone to promote anarchism or any "illegal" actions. Furthermore, all public meetings of any kind now required a government permit. This edict effectively ended anarchism as a major political movement (though it did not disappear entirely).[131] It was in this atmosphere of upheaval and repression that the feminist centennial conferences took place.

Of the two women's assemblies that took place in May of 1910, that of the progressive wing enjoyed greater success in terms of participation and long-term significance. The First International Women's Congress of the Argentine Republic included participants in the 1906 Free-Thinkers Congress and brought together women from across South America and Europe. The stated goals of the Congress included the creation of "bonds of unity" between women of all nations and "social positions" and to "modify prejudices" that obscure women's accomplishments in the home and workplace.[132] Ernestina López addressed the opening ceremonies and elaborated on these goals with a call to "elevate the concept of feminism and generate general sympathy for it." She expressed hope

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[129] "Agitación Gremial," *La Vanguardia,* 8 May 1910; "Generalizacón de la huelga: toman parte en la lucha numerosas mujeres," *La Vanguardia*, 5 May 1910; Diego Abad de Santillán, *La FOR A, ideología y trayectoria* (Buenos Aires: Proyección, 1971).

[130] "El estado de sitio," *La Vanguardia*, 14 May 1910.

[131] República Argentina, *Leyes Nacionales años 1909 y 1910* (Buenos Aires: Secretaría del Honorable Senado de la Nación, 1913), 478-83.

[132] *Primer congreso femenino…*, 14. See page 8 for a listing of the Congress' officers.

that the Congress would provide "useful elements" in terms of feminist action, and that a "cooperation that by itself is capable of miracles" would result.[133] These goals and sentiments demonstrated a continued interest in international feminism and the idea of a unified feminist movement- an ideal that must have appeared increasingly remote.

While the goal of feminist unity may have been dubious, the Congress did provide a forum for a wide range of topics of concern to feminists, outlining the agenda for Argentine feminism for decades to come. The presentations fell under one of six categories: Sociology (which included studies of working women, living conditions, and prostitution), Law (including discussions of the Civil Code and suffrage), Education (Including both adult and childhood education), Letters (mainly discussions of the literary work of women), Science (including reports on women in medicine and on alcoholism) and Arts and Industries (including the technical aspects of women's work). The majority of the presentations came from individual women, though certain organizations, including the Universitarias, the Socialist Center, the board of *Unión y Labor*, and the Gorriti Center, also contributed reports.[134] Each of these presentations touched on some aspect of feminism, encouraging women to take an active role in seeking solutions to social problems. Alicia Moreau de Justo summed up the overall impact of the Congress well when she wrote:

> This Congress has the merit of having fixed the thoughts of some Argentine women at the time on such questions as: civil and political rights, the situation of children both legitimate and illegitimate, organization of the family, divorce, and the repression of alcoholism, prostitution and gambling. It was a handful of women that had the audacity to break the silence that surrounded their problems, in an age when most men did not dare to publicly discuss

[133] *Primer congreso femenino…*, 38.

[134] *Primer congreso femenino…*, 53-4, 201-2, 315, 367-8.

> some of them. Their thinking proved to be as high-minded as that of their European sisters whose example guided them.[135]

But the immediate impact of the Congress did not appear so dramatic. Towards the end, the National League of Women Free-Thinkers moved toward a resolution to the Argentine Congress in support of the "exercise of all political and civil rights" for women. The assembly ultimately decided that such a resolution was inappropriate.[136]

While the International Women's Congress ultimately refrained from petitioning Congress to reform women's legal rights, the conference of the National Women's Council refrained from any discussion of political rights at all. Their conference, far smaller than that of the Universitarias, and strictly national in its participation, had a narrower focus that still overlapped with some of the issues discussed in the larger congress. These included presentations on women's contributions throughout history, educational reforms, and health. However, they also listened to panels with titles such as "A convincing study that the concurrent action of women in progress is not misunderstood as feminism or socialism." The list of proposals the conference produced also proved to be fairly mild. These included the creation of a maternal school, a women's commission to promote patriotism in all schools, and a protective society to uphold the "morals and culture" of working women, the teaching of "Christian" morals and of physical education to improve health, and promotion of the Sociedad de Beneficencia. However, these proposals also included calls for a maternity-leave law and for equal pay in the workplace, albeit as long-term goals.[137] While the

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[135] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 163.

[136] *Primer congreso femenino…*, 415; Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 204-5.

[137] "Informe de la presidenta de la comisión de la prensa y propaganda sobre los resultados del congreso realizado," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 9:37-38, September 1910, p.23-5.

size and scope of the Council's conference placed it at a disadvantage to the Universitarias' Congress, they did receive wider publicity in the national press. These articles praised the work of the Council and encouraged their efforts "to communicate the attractions of the home" as the best way to achieve the "expansion and uniformity of morality, and form in a single mold the Argentine soul."[138] Given the turmoil of the recent labor strikes, this wish for a unified national identity makes sense, and explains the acceptance of the milder feminism the Council espoused. However, the Council, now lacking the energy of the Radical and Socialist feminists, ultimately could not capitalize on this positive reaction. The progressive feminists of the International Congress, on the other hand, lacked the solid respectability and connections of the Council, and faced an equally great challenge in advancing their more radical agenda. Ultimately, both groups went their separate ways to pursue what they saw as the best interests of all women. It would not be until the 1930's that they showed any signs of aligning their concerns once again.

Conclusion

At the turn of the twentieth century, the feminist movement in Argentina demonstrated significant promise. The example of earlier women activists such as Juana Manuela Gorriti and Juana Manso, greater access to higher education, institutions such as the Sociedad de Beneficencia, and the appearance of new political movements in the nineteenth century created a solid foundation for the new generation of female leaders. The creation of the National Women's Council

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[138] "Informe de la presidenta de la comisión de la prensa y propaganda sobre los resultados del congreso realizado," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 9:37-38, September 1910, p.29-33; M. Gorostiga, "El Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *El Diario*, 6 September 1910.

provided an opportunity for feminism to blossom in Argentina as it brought together most of this generation of 1900 and connected them to established women's organization at the national and international levels. But this very act of unification also carried with it the seeds of dissent. On a personal level, the very presence of such exceptional and (necessarily) strong-willed individuals almost guaranteed that disputes over the leadership and direction of the Council would arise. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century this division became more and more pronounced until, in 1910, Cecilia Grierson departed the organization she had helped to create following a feud with her co-founder, Alvina Van Praet de Sala. The basis for this split came from Grierson's critiques of the Council's and Van Praet's leadership, as well as her having "presided over a congress with ideas completely antagonistic to those observed by the Argentine [National] Council [of Women]."[139] Basic ideological divisions, over and above conflicts of personality, also provoked the downfall of the Council's vision of a unified feminist movement.

Even before this break-up, the likelihood of a truly unified women's movement appeared dubious at best in the face of ideological differences. The Council never included the Anarchist feminists that had been among the first to call for greater women's rights. Socialists and Radicals, though comparatively less revolutionary in their opposition to the established government, nevertheless offered strong criticism of the establishment- one that Van Praet and the other Conservative feminists ultimately represented and on which they relied. These differences in political affiliation made unity within the Council impossible. Nevertheless, these groups did succeed in making feminism a subject of respectable national discourse and had even begun to win allies in the government. In the coming decades they would build on this foundation in order

[139] "Cartas de la señora presidenta del consejo a la Dra. Grierson," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 9:37-8, September 1910, p.9-11.

to advance the different aspects of the overall feminist agenda (that is, those ideas they shared in common, such as improvements in education and workplace conditions for women) as well as reforms with a more partisan following (such as suffrage).

Regardless of the particular ideological leanings of these feminists, all faced a similar challenge- lack of popular following from the women of the country. While all of the different groups expressed concern for the well-being- be it moral, physical or legal- of working class women, few such female workers actually participated in the activities of those organizations. Moreau's "handful" of associates consisted almost entirely of women exceptional either for their education or their wealth. Feminists in Argentina were elite. If they truly wished to lessen the legal and social burdens of their fellow women, they needed to prove that those women truly wanted a change in their status. Until they did so, the key political reforms that feminists sought could be dismissed as the desires of a small minority. In order to prove the importance of suffrage and civil code reform, feminists spent the next sixteen years broadening their appeals to ordinary citizens- male and female- in order to make their goals real.

Illustration 1-Dr. Cecilia Grierson in 1914. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 2- Alvina Van Praet de Sala, 1904. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 3-Elvira López, 1902. Source- Archivo General de la Nación.

Illustration 4- Alicia Moreau de Justo (Center) and the Centro Socialista Femenino. Source- Archivo General de la Nación.

Chapter III
The First Triumphs of Argentine Feminism, 1910-1926

> Suffrage does not constitute an end in itself, but rather is instrument used to reach a definite goal…To concede the vote to women means entrusting them with the weapon needed to fight, in our ranks and on an equal basis with us, for her own welfare and that of her inseparable companion, man.
>
> -*La Vanguardia*[140]

> Women will obtain suffrage in this country when they have been prepared for that victory; legislators do nothing than give legal form to what has lived in the soul of nations for some time; they will not really create the movement, they simply impede it and when that is no longer possible, then they follow. For this reason, we believe that in our country, in which ineptitude and ignorance are still considered feminine virtues, the danger of suffrage will remain a myth for some time.
>
> -Alicia Moreau de Justo[141]

In the wake of the 1910 conferences, the feminist movement appeared poised for a new surge in activity, in spite of the fragmentation of the National Women's Council. The creation of new and active political groups, the introduction of feminism into public political discourse, and the election of congressional deputies sympathetic to suffragist demands all suggested a bright future for women's legal rights in the nation. On the other hand, ideological differences between and within these groups and distrust of feminism at a time of social unrest hindered the advance of the women's rights agenda. Furthermore, while an increasing number of politicians expressed support of feminist ideals, they did not make them their top priority. However, the 1910's saw the development of a considerable shift in political power that made the possibility of civil code reform and voting rights far more likely than ever before. In 1912, the

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[140] "La mujer y las elecciones," *La Vanguardia*, 23 February 1920.

[141] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El sufragio femenino," *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:2, February 1911, p. 94.

Sáenz Peña law, named for the president at the time, guaranteed universal male suffrage, paving the way for the Radical Party under the leadership of Hipólito Yrigoyen to take power. The climate of reform and change gave hope to the feminists, many of whom were adherents of the new majority Party. The opportunities for feminists to make their case and be taken seriously had never been greater.

Unfortunately for the women's movement, circumstances conspired to delay their efforts yet again. In 1919, another massive strike paralyzed Buenos Aires. The week-long confrontation, later dubbed the "semana trágica", ended with a massive repression of labor unions- this despite Yrigoyen's previous efforts to court labor votes. This disaster led Yrigoyen to back off from his more innovative policies, and in this climate feminism- still an unpopular ideology with conservatives- had to wait. It did not help their case that so many feminists had joined the Socialist Party- an entity with obvious connections to labor. The possibility that grateful women voters would increase the size of the Socialist delegation in Congress doubtlessly bolstered the reluctance of mainstream politicians to support women's rights. Nevertheless, feminists continued to build their case and many politicians continued to support their arguments in principle.

Circumstances beyond the control of the Argentine feminists also helped to strengthen their arguments. World War I provided female activists with numerous examples of women making great sacrifices for the good of their countries and homes. The massive influx of women into the workplace during the war proved that female activity in the public sphere was not only possible, but also effective and even necessary. That a number of industrialized countries, including the United States and Great Britain, enacted national suffrage laws shortly after the war merely confirmed this lesson. That these nations, so often held up as models of "progress" in the world, had passed suffrage laws without any apparent negative repercussions could only enhance the arguments of

feminists in Argentina. This example helped to balance out the aftermath of the *semana trágica*, and debates over feminism began to demonstrate an increasingly favorable trend. This pattern eventually led to the first truly great success for the feminists in their quest for legal reform- the alteration of the Civil Code.

Since the 19th century, the Civil Code had equated married women in Argentina with minors, and many feminists considered civil equality to be a necessary precursor to suffrage. Much of the rhetoric surrounding feminism in the early 20th century centered on the effort to prove that women could indeed shoulder the burdens of modern life without the supervision and patronage of their husbands. The ever-growing number of women in the workplace and the obvious success of educated women in the professions made feminist arguments all the more convincing, and by the mid-1920's the feminists had won over a large segment of the political establishment. By this point, enough time had passed since the *semana trágica* for the Radicals to give more serious consideration to the feminist agenda. Yrigoyen had since turned over the presidency to Marcelo Alvear, a more conservative Radical determined to make his own mark on the Party and the Nation. Finally, the reform law passed in 1926, granting women full civic equality with men, including the right to work, testify in court, and control their own incomes. This marked the first major victory for the feminists, who could now focus on suffrage as the next phase of their plans.

Even before the Civil Code Reform, national suffrage laws began to appear in Congress in 1919. As with the first Civil Code projects, these proposals did not advance far in the legislature, inevitably ending in committee meetings. Nevertheless, that they appeared at all demonstrates the progress of the feminists' arguments. Adding to this momentum, provincial legislatures began considering suffrage laws as well, and by the end of the decade these

laws began to succeed. The national congress contributed to this growing body of proposals with their own projects for municipal suffrage for women within the federal district of Buenos Aires. By and large, these suffrage bills made little headway in the respective legislatures, but the regular introduction of women's voting rights before Congress guaranteed that the subject would remain a topic of conversation in the halls of power and in the streets.

In order to promote these legislative efforts and spread the word on feminism, female political activists created a new batch of organizations and publications. The older groups- the Council, Socialist Center, and Gorriti Center, continued to function, and the diminished anarchist movement also upheld women's rights in its own way. New, sometimes unexpected, groups also gave support to the cause of suffrage as well. The Patriotic League, an ultra-right wing group formed in reaction to the semana trágica, for example, expressed support for the idea of women's involvement in politics. These Conservatives argued that women possessed an innately calming and conservative nature, and would therefore counterbalance the more radical leftists. This argument grew out of the continuing belief that women were innately moral, and would "purify" politics throughout the nation. In contrast to the League, Dr. Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, a former member of both the Council and the Universitarias Argentinas, created her Women's Party in order to focus attention on women's legal rights. She believed that female voters would bring progressive change to the nation, bringing it up to the international standard of progress.[142] Beginning in 1919 Lanteri ran in every election in Buenos Aires until her death in 1932. Her candidacies for city government and Congress made her a figure of either admiration or amusement, depending on the perspective of the commentator.

[142] Lanteri became a candidate following extensive legal action that led the authorities to permit her name to appear on the ballot. Araceli Bellota, *Julieta Lanteri: La pasión de una mujer* (Buenos Aires: Planeta Singular, 2001), 114-6; Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto and Diego L. Arguideduy, *Mujeres de la política Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001), 265-7.

Her dogged perseverance, in any case, made her one of the stand-out feminist leaders in the 1920's, adding yet another approach to the feminist movement in Argentina.

Despite all the progress and publicity of the feminist movement in the 1910's and 20's, one limitation persisted- lack of a strong popular following. Increased suffrage among males did not seem to benefit women. Indeed, given the persistent sexism in Argentine culture and continued objections to female competition in the workplace, it would be surprising if the feminists had won over the bulk of the population. Continued apathy among working women proved at least as detrimental since it gave ammunition to those that argued that women did not want the vote. Feminism in the first quarter of the 20th century therefore remained an ideology of an elite set of women- a situation that persisted until the middle of the century.

The Sáenz Peña Law and Radical Reform

The first decade of the 20th century in Argentina closed with considerable upheaval, but the traditional power block of the Argentine elite and their party, the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN) remained in charge. With the Social Defense Law on the books, the government now had the power to remove those that most vocally threatened the existing system. Yet repression alone did not guarantee a return to social order. Within a year of the strikes and demonstrations, work began on a new law that would fundamentally alter electoral politics in the nation and ultimately bring about the collapse of the Liberal regime that had dominated the nation since the 1870's. This shift, while opening up many new opportunities in Argentine politics, did not in and of itself create a climate immediately favorable for women's suffrage and Civil Code

reform. Nevertheless, the connection between certain feminists, most notably Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, and the Radical Party certainly improved the prospects of the women's movement.

Prior to the Sáenz Peña law, elites dominated electoral politics in Argentina. In spite of small gains by the Socialists in the first decade of the 20th century, the PAN continued to enjoy a solid grip on national elections, and the existing election laws facilitated that monopoly. Although all adult male citizens could vote, many of them could not do so freely. The secret ballot did not exist in Argentina, making fraud and corruption that much simpler. Electoral victories came in a "winner-take-all" contest that made it easy to exclude minority parties, and local party bosses used tactics including bribery, intimidation, and forgery, to guarantee a desirable outcome.[143] This system did not always work perfectly. Power struggles within the PAN as well as challenges from the Socialists and Radicals threatened its hegemony. During the first decade of the 20th century, the old guard of the PAN, dominated by President Julio Roca, struggled against the new guard led by Carlos Pellegrini. This new guard, more open to the idea of reform, eventually triumphed with the election of Roque Sáenz Peña in 1910. His election, which took place in the context of the social upheaval of the labor unions, impressed on the new president the urgent need for reform. In his inaugural address, Sáenz Peña promised to introduce electoral reform immediately.[144]

The opposition parties, particularly the Radicals, encouraged this reform-indeed Radical Party leader Hipólito Yrigoyen had met with the new president

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[143] Natalio Botano, *El orden conservador: la política Argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana,1977) 175-8.

[144] David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonialization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 189; Roque Sáenz Peña, *Discurso del Dr. Roque Sáenz Peña al asumir la Presidencia de la Nación* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Penitenciaría Nacional, 1910), 59.

before his inauguration in order to discuss the terms of the reform.[145] Prior to this arrangement, the strategy of the Radicals had been one of electoral abstention. This approach, designed to highlight the lack of legitimacy in the political system, helped to depress voter turnout in Argentina throughout the 1890's and the first decade of the 1900's. In addition, the Radicals periodically staged demonstrations and even revolts to further weaken the PAN system.[146] In spite of these confrontations, the Pellegrini wing of the PAN found cause for optimism in the reform. The Radical platform did not spell out any dramatic changes in the political or social system, apart from those eventually ennacted in the Sáenz Peña law. Therefore, the Radicals could serve as a "loyal opposition" that would provide a safe forum for dissent. The PAN's leaders believed that if Sáenz Pena "disarms the revolution and gets the Radicals to accede to elections, he will gain the recognition of the legality of his own election. . .and can count on the support and confidence of all the sectors that divide the opinion of the Republic."[147] In short, the PAN expected to maintain its dominance following the passage of electoral reform. That they failed to do so must have given pause to would-be reformers in later years.

The details of the Sáenz Peña law had a significant impact on the shape of later debates on women's suffrage and further opened Congress to those that supported it. The law set the voting age at 18, and made the ballot secret. In addition, the military conscription lists doubled as the voter registration list (all male citizens faced obligatory military service beginning in 1901). Legislators believed these two provisions would cut down on fraud. As for elections themselves, the new law replaced the "winner-takes-all" system with the

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[145] Hipólito Yrigoyen, *Pueblo y gobierno*, vol. 3, *La reparación fundamental*, 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1956), 377.

[146] David Rock, *El radicalismo argentino, 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: 1992), 62-3.

[147] Ramon J. Cárcano, *Mis primeros 80 años* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1943), 301.

"incomplete list". This meant that in any congressional election, two-thirds of the available seats for a given district went to the party that won the plurality of votes, and the remaining third went to the runner-up. This reform guaranteed greater minority representation in Congress while still allowing for a dominant party to control legislative agendas. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the debate on suffrage, voting itself became a requirement- those that failed to vote faced fines as in a misdemeanor.[148] This meant that voting had become a duty, rather than a right. In an address to Congress President Sáenz Peña made this viewpoint abundantly clear:

> The collectivity that through its institutions equips citizens with the right to vote holds at the same time the right to demand that the ability to vote does not remain inactive; because from its good or bad exercise depends the incalculable good of the administration of the State. Without the egotistical inertia of the masses, the minorities that agitate within the heart of every nation would never come to place the institutional, political, or even the basic social order in serious danger.[149]

This meant that all eligible citizens had to vote. However, the new law and all those that had preceded it had never limited citizenship to the male population alone. To place voting as an obligation alongside taxes and obedience to the law made female exclusion from the polls that much harder to justify.

Feminists recognized the possibilities inherent in the voting reform law, and did not hesitate to point out its inconsistencies. The general thrust of these arguments reflected on the unequal access to political rights when all other laws

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[148] República Argentina, *Leyes nacionales, año 1911* (Buenos Aires: G. Kraft,1916) 472-501; República Argentina, *Leyes nacionales, año 1901-03* (Buenos Aires: El Comercio, 1908) 46; Yrigoyen, *Pueblo y gobierno*, vol. 3, 378-9.

[149] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones* de *1911*, v. I, p. 807. A side effect of this provision is that the "minority" Parties, such as the Radicals, could no longer legally use the method of non-participation as a means of protest. On the other hand, Sáenz Peña clearly hoped that the reform would quiet the more radical political movements now that more moderate alternatives had become available.

did impact them the same. "If there exists civil equality, that is all the inhabitants of the nation, without regard to sex, are equal before the law, and if it is an essential principle of democratic regimes that the government derives its power from the governed," wrote one commentator, "then the political incapacity of women is unjustified."[150] For the leaders of the feminist movement, the success of the Sáenz Peña law proved to be an important precedent for their own political agenda. However, in the short term the political landscape was not yet fit to accommodate women voters. While the Radical Party's success in the presidential election of 1916, the first to take place following the reform, did allow for legislation favorable to female workers and impoverished women, voting rights did not represent a priority for the Radicals as it did with the Socialists. While the Radicals did eventually introduce suffrage legislation during Yrigoyen's presidency, this legislation made little headway. In the long run, working class issues prevented a more concerted drive for women's suffrage as Yrigoyen's overtures to labor ultimately collapsed in 1919, allowing Socialists to take the initiative. In the interim, the feminists continued to bolster their case and work towards a broader popular understanding of feminism.

Feminism under Yrigoyen and World War I

The Sáenz Peña law came at a moment of uncertainty for the nation as a whole and for the feminist movement in particular. The growing fragmentation of the movement that culminated in the competing conferences of 1910 left the movement without a clear leader. While the National Council of Women continued to operate, the departure of its most politically dynamic members, including the founder of the Council, Dr. Cecilia Grierson, meant that it could no

[150] Carlos M. Vico, "Encuesta sobre el voto político y municipal de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 11: 3-4, November 1918, p. 53.

longer seriously claim preeminence. As for those feminists that departed the Council, no one entity arose to replace that organization as the focus of their activities. Once again, party loyalties and ideological differences explain this lack of unity. The Radical and Socialist Parties, though in agreement in their opposition to the PAN, ultimately did not share much common interest.[151] This lack of commonality only became more evident once the Radicals actually took power in 1916. For the feminists, the ascension of the Radicals might have made it easy for the Radical feminists, in the form of Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane and the Gorriti Center (later re-dubbed the *Asociación Pro-Derechos de la Mujer*) to take on the mantel of the premier women's political organization. However, it became clear that feminism did not enjoy any particular favor within the Radical Party (in spite of Rawson's best efforts). Therefore, the initiative within feminism came increasingly from the Socialist feminists led by Alicia Moreau de Justo, Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, and Carolina Muzzilli as well as the Independent feminist Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw. While these different strains of feminism did collaborate from time to time, differences in ideology and priorities once again prevented any permanent union between them. The vision of unity that the Council once promulgated could not be restored.

In spite of the setbacks to its power as an institution, the National Council of Women continued to function as a coordinating agency for women's social aid groups. Alvina Van Praet de Sala continued on as president until her death in 1918. Her successor, Julia Moreno de Moreno, replaced Cecilia Grierson in the official history of the Council as co-founder of the organization, clearly demonstrating the lingering resentment her departure had caused.[152] Similarly,

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[151] Within the associated parties, too, divisions became apparent. Feuding between Alfredo Palacios and Juan Justo led to fragmentation of the Socialist Party during the 1910's, and power struggles within the Radical Party divided that organization as well.

[152] "Apoteosis," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 18:63, June 1918, p.1; "Biblioteca del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *La Prensa*, 16 October 1924.

women close to Van Praet and sympathetic to her point of view on feminism took over as the officers and committee heads of the Council. As a result, the magazine largely lost the edge it held during the first decade of the Council, as it now limited itself to reports on meetings and the occasional piece of literary criticism.[153] Nevertheless, the Council maintained an active presence in the field of social aid. The elite Sociedad de Beneficencia and Damas de Caridad continued to dominate among member organizations of the Council. Other member groups included educational organizations such as the "Julia Moreno de Moreno School of Professional Women", cultural groups such as the "Mozart Academy", and national chapters of global organizations such as the Red Cross and the Young Women's Christian Association. Council committees, including Social Aid, Education and Public Instruction, Emigration and Immigration, Public Hygiene, Peace and Arbitration, Public Morality, Civil Status of Women and Legislation coordinated their efforts.[154] The last two committees, in particular, demonstrated that the Council did not entirely ignore political issues. However, it remained clear that women's legal rights remained a low priority at best for the Council, and suffrage in particular did not meet with the Council's approval. When Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane made the case for Civil Code reform and suffrage in 1919, the Council determined that while the majority of its members "agree with and believe to be indispensable the expansion of civil rights" the "opportune moment for the country" had not arrived for suffrage.[155] While the Council no longer rejected political reform as it once had, it adhered as closely as ever to its particular brand of feminism. Their philosophy remained "judicious and

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[153] *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 15:54, June 1915, p. 2.

[154] *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 15:54, June 1915, p. 32-6.

[155] "Acta de la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 19:67-8, November 1919, p.5. The meeting in question took place five months earlier.

moderate, limited to elevating the intellectual level of women, cultivating her intelligence with study and instruction in the fine arts, until we produce and establish the perfect balance between the mind that thinks and reasons and the heart that feels."[156] While the Council might prove more willing to discuss women's political rights, they still did not take any definitive action on the matter.

Radical feminists, though far more vocal in their support of suffrage, did not prove capable of transforming the success of their Party into action on their particular agenda. To be sure, the membership of the Gorriti Center cheered the success of the electoral reform in 1912 and Yrigoyen's election in 1916. However, while Yrigoyen did make some efforts to aid working class women as part of his larger plan to win over organized labor, he showed no particular interest in women's political or civil rights in spite of Rawson's vocal support.[157] Given that the Radicals did not yet enjoy a majority in Congress at that time, the delay in advancing a suffrage project appeared logical, and Rawson showed some patience in awaiting the desired reforms. However, by 1919 she decided that some prompting was in order. In a meeting in January of that year, she appealed to a broad cross-section of women to unite behind a push for "all the rights we lack in order to be equal with men in the civil, political and economic sense." Ultimately, this appeal failed to bring in those feminists already associated with existing parties.[158] Nevertheless, Rawson and her new

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[156] Rosario Puebla de Godoy in Miguel J. Font, *La mujer: encuesta feminista Argentina* (Buenos Aires: n.p, 1919?), 195. Font's work collects a wide assortment of viewpoints on feminism, both pro and con- the project began shortly after the first national suffrage project reached Congress.

[157] Carlos Abeijón and Jorge Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina antes y después de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Cuartomundo, 1975), 63-4; Asuncion Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 205.

[158] "El feminismo en el país," *El Diario*, 7 January 1919.

organization, the *Asociación Pro-Derechos de la Mujer* (The Pro-Women's Rights Association) took a bold stance on the issue of political reform for women:

> We [women], in a prosperous and free land, have patiently supported the chains of codes and prejudices that limit our actions and humiliate our dignity as conscious beings, waiting for reason and justice to triumph at last; for the thoughtless selfishness of our companions to fail at last against the noble and gentlemanly impulses of the men of our homeland; that in this new and progressive republic, routine and prejudice may not endure long. Many times we have asked ourselves if it is just that the laws were made without consulting our opinion at all, as if we were inferior and useless in every way, as if it is possible that the law of the strongest will always rule, and if humanity will never reach the level of culture necessary for the grand and sovereign law of righteousness alone to shine out.[159]

This assertive stance, while it did not bring together a new feminist coalition, did attract the attention of the national press. The reaction to the new group tended to be cautiously optimistic at first, though commentators did urge the feminists to act with decorum because "to triumph women, more than men, should be exponents of culture." However, subsequent reports on the Association demonstrated a decidedly negative view. One report asserted that in an assembly of 100 members and observers, Rawson reported a membership of thousands, consisting mainly of "campesinas and farm women (*Chacareras*) that don't understand anything about the feminist movement or suffragists." The report compared the Association meeting unfavorably to a political party, describing "terrible feminists" who objected to the very presence of men at the gathering and of members who objected to proposals without understanding their content.[160] This uncharitable description, while possibly exaggerated, highlights

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[159] Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, "La campaña feminista en la Argentina," in Font, *La mujer…*, 76-7. These remarks form part of the official declaration of the Association.

[160] "Moveimiento femenino,"*El Diario*, 15 March 1919; "Movimiento femenino: huelgas, asambleas y proclamaciones," *El Diario*, 17 March 1919.

the continued difficulties the feminists faced in organizing their efforts. Despite these challenges, the Association did make a significant impact in the events of that year. However, that impact did not belong to the Radical feminists alone, but also to the other progressive feminists and to events in Europe and North America.

Socialist feminists, long concerned with the women's civil and political rights, renewed their efforts throughout the 1910's. The Socialist Women's Center continued to act as both an interest group and a support organization within the Socialist Party, and a number of skilled women took on leadership roles within its ranks. In addition to Sara Justo, the most notable of these were Alicia Moreau de Justo (who married Party founder Juan Justo in 1924), Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto (wife of Party leader and national deputy Nicolás Repetto) and Carolina Muzzilli. These women displayed an interesting array of backgrounds that informed their priorities for the Socialist Center. Alicia Moreau de Justo, in particular, proved to be an exceptionally gifted and prolific writer and activist. Moreau trained in medicine, as had Grierson, Rawson, and Lanteri her and earned her degree in 1914.[161] By that time she had already proven herself to be an energetic political activist, having participated in the creation of the Socialist Center, the Free-Thinkers Congress of 1906 and the International Women's Congress of 1910. As an author and editor she contributed to a variety of publications, and helped create new ones to advance both Socialism and feminism. Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto originally came to socialism in her hometown of Odessa, Russia. There she attended the university, and continued her association when she immigrated to Buenos Aires in the 1890's. A gifted scholar, she was at the forefront of the Party's efforts to advance educational reform, and at the 1910 International Women's Conference she served as the

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[161] Deleis, de Titto and Arguidehuy, *Mujeres de la política…*, 323-4.

chief translator.[162] Carolina Muzzilli, on the other hand, was self-taught- one of the few feminist leaders who did not benefit from higher education. More than any other prominent feminist at that time she understood from personal experience the issues of working class women. Not surprisingly, therefore, she played the most active role in organizing and supporting working class women, without whose support, she argued, feminism as a movement must surely fail. Her untimely death in 1917 greatly hindered the ability of the Socialist Center to bring in working women.[163] These three leaders represented a new wave of progressive feminism that helped reinforce the link between Argentine Socialism and Feminism.

The Socialist's Party support for feminism had been clear since its creation, and the Party Congress of 1912 saw a reaffirmation of that support. During that Congress, Nicholas Repetto (husband of Fenia) and José Muzzilli (brother of Carolina) moved a resolution calling on the Party to expand its organization of women within its ranks and the ranks of affiliated unions. They reminded the assembly that women formed an essential and growing segment of the proletariat, and that without their inclusion the worker's movement as a whole could not succeed. The Congress therefore resolved to support the unionization of women workers and equal pay for men and women. To accomplish this, they pledged to use "conferences, pamphlets and books" to reach these women and "by making them think of their interests…they will join the Socialist Party, the Party of Class, made up of the working class in defense of its economic and political interests…" In his particular statement, José Muzzilli expressed confidence in the ability of the Party to attract female members so long as they avoided "the lyrical declarations of bourgeois feminists" and the "belligerent

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[162] Deleis, de Titto and Arguidehuy, *Mujeres de la política…*,, 249-54.

[163] Paulina Luisi, "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *Humanidad Nueva*, 11:1-2, February 1918, p.18; "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *La Vanguardia* (supplement), 11 March 1947.

demonstrations of the 'suffragettes'."[164] At this time no other party had yet made a definitive statement on women's political or civil rights. This made it simple for the Socialists to assert themselves as the leading force in the women's rights movement, a status that they would reiterate time and again over the next forty years. However, in the short term, the Socialists had to contend with their minority status in the halls of government. Without at least some support from the majority party, they could not expect success in any of their major projects.

During the PAN regimes, the Socialists frequently encountered obstacles to their legislative projects. The success of electoral reform in 1912, while giving them cause for optimism, did not mean that these obstacles disappeared. "The inertia and parliamentary disdain for constructive legislation," wrote Deputy Enrique Dickmann, "is well known." "I am not sure that the new political forces have sufficiently infused new practices and customs into the heart of the Congress," he continued, "to push it down the high road to social legislation." Despite this "inertia" the Socialists continued to press their agenda, and had even met with some success in implementing mild workplace reforms.[165] However, the Socialists also faced continued hostility to their efforts. Alicia Moreau de Justo noticed that in the Argentine press, Socialists became the "common enemy" for all politicians, uniting "the most reactionary and the most progressive" in a "singular crusade" against the party.[166] Rather than discouraging her, this seemingly unreasoning antipathy simply underscored the importance of the Socialist "mission" of "popular education" and the "elevation and betterment of

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[164] "X Congreso Nacional del Partido Socialista," *La Vanguardia*, 17 January 1912.

[165] Enrique Dickmann, *Jornada legal de trabajo y semana inglesa* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1914), 23-4; Juan Justo, *El socialismo argentino* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1915). Dickmann was a friend of Fenia Chertcoff whose family had immigrated to Argentina around the same time.

[166] Alicia Moreau, "Fábula antigua y moraleja actual," *Humanidad Nueva*, v.9, 1916, p. 99.

the mass of men."[167] Socialists and feminists in the Party therefore made concerted efforts to make information about their cause available to as much of the general population as possible.

The forms that this education and social aid took resembled, in many ways, the actions of the National Women's Council- though the Socialists made a point of distancing themselves from the more traditional styles of charity. The ill-effects of religious charities and elitist "feminism of the salon" became a recurring theme in Socialist writings.[168] The Socialist Women's Center combined an intellectual appeal with services for the working class. For example, the Socialist Center sponsored or participated in numerous conferences on prohibition, tax reform, education, divorce, and the needs of working women and petitioned Congress on these issues; supported Socialist candidates in elections; created children's centers and the adult learning center *Sociedad Luz*; backed male and female strikers and sent inspectors to make sure management followed workplace regulations; and sponsored festivals for children and families during May Day and other holidays.[169] While some of these actions- particularly the support of strikers and the petitions to Congress on issues such as divorce- clearly differed from those of the Council, the overall picture of the Center's activities did not seem to differ greatly from those of "salon" feminists. Nevertheless, the hoped-for outpouring of support from working-class women never materialized.

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[167] Alicia Moreau, "El triunfo socialista," *Humanidad Nueva,* v. 9, 1916, p. 134-5.

[168] Bartolomé Bosio, "Caridad del clérigo-burgués y el socialismo," *La Vanguardia*, 20 April 1901; Alicia Moreau, "El feminismo en la evolución social," *Humanidad Nueva*, 4:10, October 1911, p. 357-8.

[169] Fenis Chertcoff de Repetto, "El movimiento socialista femenino en la República Argentina," *Almanaque del Trabajo 1918*, p.142.

By the beginning of the 1920's, the Center still had plans to "initiate an intense propaganda campaign" among working women in order to "break the indifference that they have demonstrated until now and interest them in the redemption of their rights." Despite the credible claim that the Socialists alone "really concerned themselves with the wellbeing of women," it appeared that most women proved reluctant to support that Party.[170] This reluctance may be explained in part by the persistent resistance of other political parties to the Socialists message. It may also be the case that the reach of the various Socialists activities and groups was not as extensive as its partisans might have hoped. Finally, it must be remembered that the average working woman simply might not have had the time, ability, or inclination to support the Socialists, even if they appreciated the work the Center performed. Their efforts and rhetoric notwithstanding, the Socialists ultimately could not credibly claim to be the foremost leaders of the women's rights movement.

In addition to the Socialists and Radicals, a number of other, smaller groups with feminist agendas appeared throughout the 1910's. The Catholic Church, for example, created new women's organizations in order to mitigate social unrest and reaffirm the traditional link between women and the Church. The Liga de Damas Católicas Argentinas, created in 1911, tried to spread Catholic teachings in working class neighborhoods and created a bank and shelters to promote respectable behavior. The Centro de Estudios "Blanca de Castilla," created in 1916, sought to investigate working class living conditions in support of Catholic labor groups.[171] Neither of these groups expressed a political agenda, staying more in line with the Conservative feminism of the National

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[170] "Centro Socialista Femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 5 May 1921.

[171] Sandra McGee Deutsch, "La mujer y la derecha en Argentina, Brasil y Chile, 1900-1940," in Dora Barrancos, ed. *Historia y genero*, (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1993), 100-4.

Council of Women. On the more progressive side, the Liga para los Derechos de la Mujer y del Niño called for "a social role for women that is not only equivalent, but even analogous to a point, with that which men play in their social and intellectual activities."[172] While none of these groups lasted long, they contributed to the overall growth of feminist awareness. However, the war in Europe would overshadow their accomplishments, and provide a new source of encouragement to the feminist movement.

Although Argentina did not participate in the First World War, news of the war and debates over which side to support captured national interest. Having ties of immigration and commerce to both Germany and Great Britain, the people of Argentina split over the best outcome to the conflict. Feminists participated in this debate by forming temporary organizations to support civilians. These groups organized fundraisers to send relief supplies to Europe, both on their own initiative and through local chapters of international organizations such as the Red Cross. Others provided assistance to refugees or to those left stranded by the outbreak of the war.[173] These activities provided a backdrop for the larger impact of the War on the debate over feminism. In Europe and North America, the massive mobilization of armies meant that women faced ever-greater responsibility for maintaining the "home front". This important role provided feminists in these regions with powerful leverage to advance their calls for political rights, and following the war Great Britain, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Luxembourg, Poland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Iceland, The United States and Ireland all granted suffrage.[174] While some of

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[172] "Lo que dice la prensa diaria de 'Unión y Labor,'" *Unión y Labor*, 4:41, February 1913, p.28.

[173] "Asociación de Damas Argentinas," *El Diario*, 16 December 1918; "Informe de la directora de la oficina de informaciones y ayuda social," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 15:55-6, November 1915, p. 55.

[174] Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: Internaitonal Feminist Persepctives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 350. The countries are listed in

these laws put distinct age or property restrictions on women voters, the very willingness of so many countries to grant suffrage over such a short space of time represented a dramatic change. Such a massive international shift in favor of female political participation could not fail to make an impact on Argentina. Feminists in that country had always looked abroad for inspiration and support (the National Council of Women formed part of the International Council of Women and Socialist feminists traced their strategies to the Second Socialist International), so the idea of borrowing the arguments of the victorious suffragists and holding up these countries as models for their own nation came naturally.[175]

The particular arguments related to the war that Argentine feminists used related particularly to the crucial support women had provided for their fighting men. Even before the war ended, feminists recognized the shifts that might occur in the political landscape as a result of the conflict. Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, for example, sympathized with the tragedy the women of Europe faced but believed that the result would be a net improvement in their political and social status. This would come about due to the "special circumstances of the conflict that have obliged them to replace men in their industrial, agricultural, and even administrative posts so as not to disrupt the march of daily life."[176] Emilia Salza agreed with this appraisal, anticipating that men returning from war would

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chronological order- the first seven passed suffrage laws in 1918, the Netherlands and Sweden in 1919, Belgium, Iceland, and the U.S. in 1920, and Ireland in 1922. Several other nations, including New Zealand, Australia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Canada had already passed national suffrage laws, as had several U.S states.

[175] Ellen Carol Dubois, "Woman Suffrage Around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism," in Daley and Noaln, *Suffrage and Beyond…* 255, 260.

[176] "Encuesta de 'Humanidad Nueva': opinión de la Sra. Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto," *Humanidad Nueva*, 9:2, February 1916, p. 70. The first two editions of the journal contained a number of short opinion pieces along the lines of those described here. See pages 5-6, 81, 125, and188 of *Humanidad Nueva*, v. 9, 1916.

view their spouses in a new light and understand what women could really do.[177] Others took on a more pessimistic view, believing that the catastrophic loss of life would lead the combatant nations to turn to polygamy in order to rebuild their populations. Yet even in this case, women would use their majority status to claim the vote and "she will impose her will in the sense of assuring peace between nations, fighting against militarization of the schools and crying out against promoters of armed conflict."[178] The end of the war made the pressure to make suffrage a reality even greater:

> If [women] are as capable as men in administration, construction, and operation of machinery and can even build cannons and munitions, if they are as interested as men in the creation of laws that serve everyone without injuring or exploiting them, etc. Why should they not use the vote to influence the election of the government or general administration?[179]

Those that cheered the success of suffrage laws in Europe recognized that feminists had laid down a great deal of groundwork in order to make the reforms happen. However, the war "put in relief" both the best qualities of women and the "prejudices" that made suffrage "an object of laughter and ridicule."[180] Suffrage therefore became a reality when a crisis made its necessity apparent. For Argentina, a crisis in the year following the end of the war also served as the backdrop for the first effort to give women the vote nationwide.

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[177] "Encuesta de 'Humanidad Nueva': opinión de la Sta. Emilia Salza," *Humanidad Nueva*, 9:1, January 1916, p. 1-2.

[178] "Encuesta de 'Humanidad Nueva': opinión de la Sta. Rosa Berenstein," *Humanidad Nueva*, 9:2, February 1916, p. 71-3.

[179] Raul Villareal, "Encuesta sobre el voto político y municipal de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 11:3-4, March-April 1918, p. 58. Also see Pablo Barranchea, "Encuesta sobre el voto político y municipal de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 11:3-4, March-April 1918, p. 41.

[180] "El voto a la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 11 June 1921. Also see Isolina S. de Centeno in Font, *La mujer…*, p. 166.

The First Suffrage Projects and the Semana Trágica

Following Yrigoyen's victory in the election of 1916, his government began making tenuous efforts to reach out to organized labor and the working class. However, by 1919, the unions began to show their impatience with the slow pace of these reforms. Here, too, the war played a role as the naval conflict limited Argentina's access to its traditional trading partners in Europe, particularly Great Britain. The end result was the most serious internal violence the nation had seen in nearly thirty years. In the end, the unions lost in their effort to force their issues, and a new surge of right-wing activism dealt the labor movement a serious setback. Nevertheless, the feminism movement, bolstered by the successes of their sisters in Europe, went ahead with the their first serious bids to have the Argentine electoral codes adjusted in order to include female voters. While the association of feminism with leftists may have ultimately doomed this attempt to failure, the continued dominance of the Radicals, the example of Europe and North America, and the perception of women as moral and stable figures in times of crisis lent this first effort credibility.

The specific circumstances leading to the "Tragic Week" of January 1919 are well known to students of Argentina, and need only be briefly summarized here. World War I had caused a serious drop-off in the Argentine economy, only partially offset by the increased market for consumer goods produced in the factories concentrated in Buenos Aires. All businesses related to the export sector and those industries that relied on imports, such as metallurgy, experienced precipitous declines in profits. Unemployment skyrocketed during the war years, and did not fully recover until the late 1920's. The ensuing frustration led unions to step up strike activity, which tripled between 1915 and

1918.[181] This strike activity culminated with a confrontation between a steelworker's union and the newly formed right-wing organization, the Liga Patriótica (Patriotic League). The League, designed to protect the nation from unwanted "immigrant radicalism," proved to be an effective tool for strikebreaking. During the *semana trágica*, league members, including many working class men, paraded through the streets of the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Once shouting "kill the Jews!" and "kill the commies!" while destroying property and attacking residents. Ultimately, the combination of direct violence and the political pressure placed on Yrigoyen led to the conclusion of the strike on terms distinctly unfavorable to labor.[182] This confrontation revived long-standing concerns over social order, and the new right-wing groups as well as the leftists looked for answers. Ironically, both saw cause for hope in the idea of a more active political role for women.

As might be anticipated for a strongly conservative organization, the Patriotic League exalted the home and glorified maternal influence within the domestic sphere. This attitude had deep roots in Argentine culture, and was not unique to the League. Yet these arch-conservatives took an unexpected route to advancing their brand of nationalism by actively recruiting women into their ranks.[183] Alongside the Conservative feminists, the Legaue's founder, Manuel Carles (who had advised the National Council of Women on political affairs), believed that women had a social role that could cleanse society. While he did

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[181] Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 112-4. Lewis gives the number of strikes in 1915 as 65 total involving 12,000 workers, versus 196 in 1918 involving 133,000 workers.

[182] Jeremy Adelman, "State and Labor in Argentina: The Portworkers of Buenos Aires, 1910-21," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 25:1, February 1993, p. 91-3; Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, 114-5; Sandra F. McGee, "The Visible and Invisible Liga Patriotica Argentina, 1919-28: Gender Roles and the Right Wing," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 64:2, May 1984, 238-9.

[183] McGee, "The Visible and Invisible Liga Patriotica Argentina…", 239-40.

not support the idea that men and women could fulfill each other's roles, he nevertheless recognized the importance of including women in his movement. This attitude spread to other members of the League, who sometimes took it to extremes. Some members went so far as to advocate suffrage in order to enhance the ability of women to exercise their moral influence over the nations, an idea that even the National Council of Women had not yet endorsed.[184] However, most members of the League resisted the full political implications of female participation, and did not support suffrage. Women's activism within the League therefore consisted of festivals and outreach programs designed to "Argentinize" women and children in the cities.[185] The women of the League thus performed a role not unlike that of many other women's organizations- they supported a larger movement while seeking to indoctrinate their fellow women through community service. This strategy played on the idea of women as inherently adapted for the home and for moral instruction.

The idea that women possessed an inherently moral/domestic quality formed an integral part of any argument designed to justify their activity in the public realm. While individual activists might vary in the extent to which women should be included in politics, all seemed to agree that women based their lives in home and family, and that meant that they had to have some way to shape society in order to defend their realm. "What greater mission can be conceived for women," wrote one commentator in a leftist journal, "than that of having children and shaping men?" For these feminists, the axiom "behind every great man there is a woman" held a literal truth, that all famous men "were the spiritual sons of their mothers, not their fathers."[186] Despite all the other arguments

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[184] "Se clausuro ayer el congreso nacionalista de la Liga Patriótica," *La Prensa*, 25 May 1926; McGee Deutsch, "La mujer y la derecha…", p. 113-4.

[185] McGee Deutsch, "La mujer y la derecha…", p. 105-6.

[186] "¿Cómo ha de ser la mujer?" *Humanidad Nueva*, 8:11, August 1915, p. 466-7.

related to feminism, another writer asserted, “everyone recognizes the importance of motherhood in the past, present, and future and the utility and necessity of making the greatest number of women possible fit” for their maternal duties.[187] The existence of a wide variety of organizations designed to train and assist mothers gave proof that feminists of all ideologies agreed with this statement.

However, the seeming universal acceptance of women’s value as mothers by no means translated into a universal acceptance of feminism or suffrage. Some right-wing critics believed that women already exercised considerable power within the home, and that political activity would transform them into “caricatures of men.” For others, the very meaning of feminism was to “perfect women as women, limiting them to their family mission.”[188] However, feminists argued that the very importance of the domestic role made women made them not only fit for the vote, but also essential for democracy. After all, if a woman could be trusted with such an important job as raising children, surely they were fit to cast a vote? Besides, “twenty centuries of masculine civilization have plainly demonstrated their inability to govern smoothly”- women could do no worse.[189] Alicia Moreau added to this argument the consideration of upbringing- if women were raised for the home alone, or taught from birth that the domestic sphere was their only place and highest ambition, then that attitude would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This being the case, men and women alike in all classes had to change their attitudes- allowing women greater political and

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[187] Eugenia Viale, “Para las madres,” *Unión y Labor*, 4:45-6, June-July 1913, p. 14.

[188] Estanislao Zeballos in Font, *La mujer…*, 19-20; Luis Reyna Almandos, *La mujer…*, 127.

[189] “La mujer y su situación en la vida moderna,” *La Mujer y la Casa,* no. 2, November 1919, p. 5-6; “Las sufragistas bellas,” *La Razón,* 10 May 1913.

civil rights would go a long ways towards this goal.[190] With these arguments, feminists and politicians set the stage for the first serious consideration of a women's voting act.

Six months after the *semana trágica* and shortly after the conclusion of the Versailles treaty, Rogelio Araya, a Radical Party deputy from the city of Buenos Aires, presented his proposal to the Congress.[191] This was the first national women's suffrage law to come before that body, though a proposal for local voting rights within the capital city had appeared three years earlier.[192] The Araya proposal gave women the same political rights and responsibilities as men, but with two key differences. First, he explicitly excluded women from the obligatory military service that men owed. This became a regular feature in nearly every suffrage project for the next twenty-eight years. Second, he set the voting age for women four years higher than that for men (women would have to be twenty-two rather than eighteen).[193] This proved to be one of the more controversial dimensions of the project, one that only occasionally re-appeared but that did not factor into the final law of 1947.

In making his case for the law, Araya made use of many of the arguments discussed above. He began his case with references to the suffrage projects then under consideration in the U.S, Britain, and France and those already passed in Finland, Australia and New Zealand (the first three countries to enact women's suffrage). He then moved on to observe that the principle that "people

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[190] Alicia Moreau, "La inferioridad de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva,* 9:1, January 1916, 16-9.

[191] Vera Pichel, *Mi país y sus mujeres* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Patria Grande, 1990) 51; Aldo Armando Coca, *Ley de sufragio femenino* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1948), 31-4.

[192] República Argentina, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1916*, v. 2, p. 1279-87.

[193] República Argentina, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1919*, v.3, p. 201; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino,* 33. Cocca notes that, according to Argentine law, a woman under the Araya project would be able to wed before being able to vote.

should not adhere to laws that they themselves have not authorized" formed the basis for democracy, and should apply to women as much as men. He rejected as mere prejudice the idea that "women lack the capacity for politics" and even insisted that "women are better suited than men to exercise the vote well because they are almost never criminals or alcoholics." This "greater virtue" of women had worked wonders in those nations that possessed the vote since women "have in mind the moral value of candidates." Araya concluded that "this intervention on the part of women is needed now more than ever in this hour of spiritual disorder." "Sectarian anarchy," he argued, "threatens not only the stability of commerce, industry, and political institutions but even the family itself." Araya expressed conviction that women voters would restore law and order and would back legislation suppressing alcoholism and providing protection for themselves and their children.[194] This discourse contained all of the most significant elements of contemporary feminist discourse- foreign precedents, the idea of women's moral superiority based on her place within the home, and the belief that with her vote she would guarantee stability and raise the moral character of the nation. Clearly, Araya had paid attention to the ideas of the feminists. Unfortunately for them, despite Araya's passionate defense of the idea, the project went to committee and remained there. Nevertheless, the idea of women's suffrage had its first hearing in Congress, and would reappear on a regular basis over the next three decades. In the meantime, the Araya proposal provided an opportunity for a new form of feminism to take shape.

The Araya project did not immediately generate much notice outside of the Chamber of Deputies. The mainstream press mentioned the proposal, and a similar project in the Senate barely registered.[195] However, the Congress did

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[194] República Argentina, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1919*, v. 3, p. 202-3.

[195] "Apuntes parlamentarios; los derechos políticos de la mujer," *La Prensa*, 25 July 1919, p.10; República Argentina, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones 1919*, v. 1, p. 778.

receive a letter of support for the Araya project from a new feminist organization- the Partido Feminista Nacional (National Feminist Party).[196] This Party, organized by Dr. Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, served as a means to generate debate over and support for suffrage specifically. As a political party, its successes were limited at best. However, it exemplified a new wave of feminist political activity that followed the introduction of the Araya project. That project, itself the result of nearly two decades of women's rights activism in Argentina, bolstered that cause and helped fuel new approaches in the women's movement.

The National Feminist Party and "Practice" Elections

At the time the Araya project made its way to the Chamber of Deputies, the various feminist groups re-organized in order to make a fresh attempt at supporting women's political rights. The Radical and Socialist feminists saw a fresh opportunity in the elections of 1920. These congressional elections provided a high-profile situation in which women could demonstrate their political acumen. The approach taken by these feminists was to hold mock elections alongside the official voting in order to prove that women wanted to vote and could do so in an orderly and responsible fashion. At the same time, the new National Feminist Party entered the fray of electoral politics without waiting for a suffrage law. With the same goal in mind as the Socialist and Radical feminists, Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw ran for Congress in the 1920 election. Although she did not emerge victorious, her efforts along with those of the Radicals and Socialists certainly raised the profile of feminism in Argentina. However, this did not necessarily make feminism more respectable in the mind of skeptics. Indeed,

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[196] República Argentina, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones 1919*, v. 4, p. 233.

these public exercises may have served to reinforce common stereotypes of the feminists and reinforced the determination of critics to resist their advance.

Lanteri de Renshaw (1879-1932) in many ways made an excellent candidate for political office and for the leadership of a feminist organization. An Italian immigrant, she was the third woman in the nation to enter medical school, and like her two predecessors in the field she had ties to the National Council of Women. This signified both a prosperous family background as well as a keen intellect and personal determination- her father owned a number of tenement houses (conventillos). Her biographers suggest that her observations of the residents of this poor housing as a child may have inspired her to pursue medicine. In any case, during her training she interacted with those who sought improvements in public health, particularly among the working class.[197] Through her training, she apparently encountered considerable prejudice, hindering the completion of her degree, which she received in 1907.[198] This may have encouraged her to seek an ever more individualistic approach. In later years, Alicia Moreau de Justo reflected that Lanteri's "struggle had an overly personal character" that hindered her ability to cooperate with others that might have aided her. Others admired her strong personality and praised her for opening doors that "the evils of prejudice and error accumulated over centuries."[199] Regardless of public opinion, Lanteri forged ahead with her particular project- the creation of the first all-female political party.

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[197] Bellota, *Julieta Lanteri,* 23, 37-8.

[198] Ibid., 40-8.

[199] Marta Cichero, *Alicia Moreau de Justo* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994), 160 (excerpt from an interview); Adelia Di Carlo, "Doctora Julieta Lanteri; La gran líder del feminismo argentino ha muerto," *Cartas y Caretas*, 4 March 1932, p. 47; "Falleció la Dra. Lanteri," *El Diario*, 25 February 1932.

The idea of a women's political party neither began nor ended with Lanteri. Carolina Muzzilli had contemplated a similar project before her death in 1917, but never got a chance to implement it.[200] Lanteri launched her efforts between the *semana trágica* and the introduction of the Araya project. During the inauguration of the Feminist Party, "well attended by ladies and gentlemen", she announced her candidacy for the Chamber of Deputies. During her speech, she portrayed the rationale for this move and for the creation of the party as:

> An affirmation of my consciousness that tells me to fulfill my duties; an affirmation of my independence, which satisfies my spirit and is not subject to the false chains of moral or intellectual slavery. And it is an affirmation of my sex, of which I am proud and for which I want to fight. We affirm, fellow citizens, that our rights to a democratic life shall be fully realized. We affirm our rights to an independent life, offering our thoughts and actions, without fear for the manner in which they may be judged. We affirm our rights to a good life, to truth and to justice, and to all that shall be said and done.[201]

In addition, she laid out a more specific platform for the Feminist Party. This included innovative measures such as paying mothers a government salary for the invaluable service they provided the nation. She also supported ideas more in keeping with the other feminist groups, such as expanded support for orphans and measures to restrict alcoholism and prostitution.[202] Given the similarities between her platform and that of the Radical and Socialist feminists, her decision to strike out on her own may seem puzzling. It is difficult to avoid Moreau's conclusion that Lanteri did indeed take on an overly personal view of politics. However, Lanteri's boldness in organizing the Feminist Party clearly

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[200] Francisco P. Súnico, "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *Humandiad Nueva*, 11:1-2, January 1918, p. 23.

[201] "Candidatura de la Doctora Lanteri Renshaw: Su procolomación," *La Prensa*, 16 March 1919.

[202] *Ibid.*

distinguished her from her contemporaries, allowing her to set her own priorities without concern for an established ideology- hence her references to an "independent life" free from "chains of moral or intellectual slavery."

Regardless of her intent, reaction to her first candidacy appeared less than favorable. The mainstream press criticized her rallies as poorly organized and her speeches as poorly enunciated and so long that people began to walk out.[203] The Socialists, on the other hand, displayed a more tolerant view, expressing sympathy for Lanteri and her goals. Nevertheless, they argued that the vote for women had to come before they could support voting for a woman.[204] In any case, the outcome of the election made this criticism moot, at least for the time being. In the end, Lanteri received some 1730 votes, versus 56,418 for the winner.[205] While her tally put her well out of the running, her ability to win any votes at all served as a symbolic victory- she had run a campaign, and had convinced people to support her in her efforts. Lanteri, never one to give up easily, took this initial effort as encouragement to vote again. She had run in the elections of 1920, and this time she shared the stage with other feminists as well.

In the years since the 1910 conferences, the Socialist and Radical feminists had continued to operate through distinct organizations and under distinct leaders. Although they agreed on the importance of suffrage, civil code reform and workplace improvements, the two sectors preferred separate strategies to coordinated action. However, the appearance of the Araya project and Lanteri's candidacy the previous year inspired them to cooperate on a new and innovative tactic that could enhance their own particular agendas as well as their common goals. In February of 1920, the Socialists, Radicals, and the

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[203] "Movimeinto femenino: huelga, asamblea, y proclamaciones," *El Diario*, 17 March 1919; "La candidatura femenina," *El Diario*, 19 March 1919.

[204] "El voto a la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 20 March 1919.

[205] "La elección nacional: Termino del escrutino," *La Vanguardia*, 5 April 1919.

Feminist Party inaugurated a new group, the National Feminist Union. The Union's chief purpose was to organize and oversee a mock election in Buenos Aires, to be held simultaneously with the national election of that year. "Although it will not hold legal value," the organizers proclaimed, "no one can ignore the moral significance of this act, since it will be a completely impartial view of the future female electorate."[206] The Union solicited candidate lists from all the major parties, encouraging them to endorse the mock election and turn out voters for the attempt. In this way, the feminists sought to provoke interest in political parties at the prospect of female suffrage and to "awaken in women the desire to study the political and social problems of our republic" as well as gauge their reactions to those problems. The Union, headed by the Socialist Alicia Moreau, promised that the vote would be entirely "apolitical" and "impartial", and succeeded in gaining support from the "principle feminist organizations" and the Radical, Socialist, and Progressive Democrat Parties.[207]

While the choice of Moreau may have given rise to doubts about the impartiality of the mock election, the national press demonstrated a positive response to the exercise. As the March 7 election approached, newspapers reported on the "active preparations" of the Union and expressed interest in learning how a segment of the population "that has never been consulted" would react in an election.[208] On the day itself, the reaction was much more mixed. *La Naciòn*, for example, reported that as many as 400 women turned out at each of

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[206] "Ensayo del voto femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 10 February 1920; Marcela Marìa Alejandra Nari, "Maternidad, polìtica y feminismo," in Fernanda Gil Lozano, Valeria Silvina Pita and Marìa Gabriela Ini, eds. *Historia de las mujeres en la Argentina, siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2000), 197-8.

[207] "Emancipaciòn polìtica de la mujer: reoluciones tomadas en la asamblea de organizaciones feministas," *La Razòn*, 14 February 1920; "Ensayo de sufragio femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 15 February 1920; "Ensayo electoral femenino," *La Razòn*, 24 February 1920.

[208] "Sufragio femenino," *El Diario*, 23 February 1920.

the polling places across the city, and women of all ages and classes participated. They also observed that Socialist Sara Justo turned up to vote at no less than four of those polls in order to test the accuracy of the system put in place. The overall tone of the article demonstrated pleasure at the "platonic enthusiasm" of voters and poll workers alike. On the other hand, *El Diario* observed that with 20 polling places in operation, only about 2500 women voted, and that they observed a climate of "apathy" at those polls their reporters visited. The official tally of the votes gave a strong majority to the Socialists- 1995 votes, versus 619 for Lanteri's Party, 465 for the Radicals, 397 for the Progressive Democrats, and 402 for other candidates.[209] The analysis of these results suggested that the mock election may have both hindered and aided the cause of women's suffrage.

As the leaders of the Union and the analysts of the press reviewed the results, they saw cause for both celebration and alarm. On the one hand, women had clearly shown an interest in elections and politics, and had participated in an orderly fashion. With only a month to prepare, the Union had successfully brought off their experiment. If the turn-out was low, the feminists involved could console themselves with the observation that theirs was a purely voluntary exercise, as opposed to the mandatory official voting. By the same token, it is not unreasonable to assume that many would-be female voters might simply not have been able to reach the Union's polls because of work or family obligations. Such considerations led the major newspapers to concede that while the low turnout might suggest that suffrage did not require immediate attention, feminists should still pursue it. However, they also observed that the "extreme parties" in particular would benefit from the pursuit of women's voting rights. *La Naciòn*, in

[209] "Ensayo del voto femenino en la capital," *La Naciòn*, 8 March 1920; "El voto femenino, inocente diversiòn electoral," *El Diario*, 8 March 1920; "El Ensayo del voto femenino," *La Naciòn*, 10 March 1920. The article in *El Diario* mentions that the reporters did not arrive at the polls until 5 PM, making fatigue a reasonable explanation for the apparent "apathy" that they observed.

particular, noted that the initial results of the mock election "frankly favored" the Socialist Party. While dismissing the notion that the majority of women in Buenos Aires truly favored this "tendency", the article did suggest that these results reflected "gratitude" for the Party that "in its electoral propaganda has promised [women] to bring feminist agitation to Congress."[210]

This revealing article suggests a fear that, at least initially, women would support Socialists in order to thank them for their long-standing advocacy of their political rights. Even a temporary surge in Socialist support surely worried the political mainstream. The notion that women approved of "feminist agitation" likely raised even more alarm. The Socialists, for their part, did nothing to discourage the association between feminism and their Party. On the contrary, they reaffirmed their long-standing support of suffrage and used the occasion of the mock election to reinforce their claim as the principle advocates for women's rights. As they saw it, the recent experience of suffrage in Europe demonstrated that women would "confirm and accentuate the evolution of political democracy" instead of supporting conservative and clerical candidates, as some anticipated. In any case, the Socialists fully expected suffrage to become a "beautiful reality" in the near future. In the meantime, they publicized their own rules that guaranteed the right of women to participate fully in Party assemblies and elections.[211] For these reasons, many politicians must surely have felt less sanguine about the idea of women's suffrage. As for the feminists themselves, the Union, now firmly under Moreau's leadership, continued to operate throughout the 1920's, conducting further mock elections and publicizing feminist

[210] Reproduced in Font, *La Mujer*, p. 202 and Cichero, *Alicia Moreau de Justo*, 161-2.

[211] "La mujer y las elecciones," *La VanguardiaI, 23 February 1920*; "Por los derechos de la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 4 March 1920; "Asamblea local- quienes pueden votar," *La Vanguardia*, 22 August 1926.

opinion through its magazine, *Nuestra Causa*. Alongside Lanteri's regular candidacies, these actions helped to keep feminism in the public eye.[212]

Following the events of the *semana trágica*, feminists organized themselves to capitalize on the political ferment of the day and provide a new source of stability through female suffrage. However, Lanteri's unusual approach and the Socialist leaning of the National Feminist Union, while making feminism more visible, also made it appear as a marginal movement with dangerously radical potential. In addition, the "bad habit of personalizing everything" that seemed to characterize Argentine politics led to the "misdirection of forces" within feminism. Feminists could only temporarily overcome the multiplicity of agendas and ideologies in pursuit of suffrage while addressing all of the other projects and reforms they desired. Nevertheless, feminists continued to build their case for greater female rights, paving the way for the much sought-after Civil Code Reform as more men responded to the "solemn obligation" to "listen generously" to feminist arguments.[213]

The Case for Reform from 1919 to 1926

In the years following the first suffrage law, new publications and the persistence of the feminist groups gradually won over a significant portion of the population. Fresh attempts at Civil Code reform and suffrage laws demonstrated at least a tacit acceptance of the idea of women's legal equality with men. While opposition to feminism persisted, the nature of these objections were rarely

[212] "El voto femenino de mañana," *El Diario,* 20 November 1920; "Ensayo de voto femenino," *La Vanguardia*, 25 November 1920 (This mock election coincided with a municipal election, and saw 5814 women vote); "Uniòn Feminista Nacional," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 298-9.

[213] "El movimiento feminista," *El Diario,* 8 January 1919; Elvira Lòpez in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 131-2; Miguel Font in *La mujer…,* p. 249.

explicit. In the long run, the practicality and necessity of Civil Code Reform, became undeniable, while suffrage began to appear inevitable to all concerned.

The women's publications of the 1920's varied widely in their form and content, but tended to share similar themes. Some of these magazines focused on "traditional" women's activities- child-care, fashion, and home economics. Such magazines usually made themselves out as aids to women's daily life and as a means for self-improvement within the domestic sphere.[214] At times, these journals could display a distinctly anti-feminist slant, such as the magazine *Crónica Femenina*, that defined women as "an unfaithful balance that rises on the side with the greatest weight."[215] Others, such as *Nuestra Causa*, the journal of the National Feminist Union, joined similar magazines (such as that of the National Council of Women) as a source of news on the feminist movement in Argentina and abroad, a forum for women's political issues, and on studies of social concerns. The latter category, in particular, tended to emphasize the impact of problems such as alcoholism on the home.[216] Others took on a more moderate approach. "We are not feminists in the deterministic and blind sense," wrote the editors of *Femenil* in its first issue, "nor are we enemies of women or their just demands…we are feminists in the soft and tranquil style."[217] Finally, there were those that preferred a more academic approach to women's issues, publishing articles on philosophy, sociology, and theology as applied to women.[218] This multiplicity of women's magazines demonstrated once again the variety of perspectives at play in the feminist movement and the ever-growing difficulty of

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[214] *La mujer y la casa*, No. 1, October 1919.

[215] *Crónica Femenina*, 1:1, 7 August 1924, p. 16.

[216] *Nuesta Causa*, May-June 1921.

[217] "El shake-hands y el besamanos," *Femenil*, 1:1, 14 September 1925, p. 12.

[218] *Acciòn Femenina*, 5:49, August 1926.

presenting a united front. At the same time, the persistence of "domestic" topics in these magazines reflects the continued adherence to the notion that maternity and womanhood went hand in hand.

As these publications sought to broaden the audience for feminist perspectives, the various women's organizations continued their traditional activities. The Socialist Women's Center, for example, conducted literacy campaigns and petitioned Congress on issues such as the regulation of alcohol, divorce, labor rights for women, elimination of religious education in public schools, and Civil Code reform.[219] Similarly, the National Council of Women continued to support the charitable activities of its member organizations while resisting the more dramatic reforms its Socialist, Radical, and Independent counterparts advocated. There remained those within the Council that recognized that "any number of municipal questions are, by definition, household questions" and that the vote for women would facilitate their resolution.[220] However, the desire to steer clear of politics remained. For example, when Alicia Moreau de Justo invited the Council to join the National Feminist Union in a petition to Congress to protest military spending, the Council declined precisely because "afterwards the Council would be unable to avoid getting mixed up in politics." In addition, Council policy prohibited "allying with any other association in these matters."[221] While the desire to remain clear of politics was disingenuous, the Council clearly had no desire to try to reunite with those that had split from it over a decade ago. In any case, it continued to focus primarily

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[219] "La lucha contra el analfabetismo," *Nuestra Causa*, June 1921, p. 281; "Pro derechos civilies de la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 8 August 1926, p. 1. At this point, Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto presided over the Center.

[220] Elia M. Martinez, "Informe de la comisiòn de prensa y propaganda," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 23:81-2, September 1923, p. 32.

[221] "Acta de la reunión extraordinaria celebrada el 5 de Octubre de 1923," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 23:83-4, April 1924, p. 21.

on educational services, providing a variety of adult classes through its library.[222] In this way it reaffirmed its Conservative orientation, spelled out in plain terms shortly before the Civil Code Reform:

> The National Council of Women of the Argentine Republic is not, as one might say, a women's rebel club in which one cultivates and foments exaggerated aspirations the realization of which would overthrow the divine laws of nature. It is purely and simply a center of study and work; its ideals do not go against divine law but rather against human laws based in sophisms and prejudice that have deprived women of the rights that their status as human beings grants them.[223]

The Council clearly retained the cautious approach endorsed by Van Praet de Sala, leaving political reform to the Socialists, Radicals, and Independents. However, even this mild feminism proved objectionable to some commentators.

Opposition to Feminism

While the notion of female participation in public affairs and the reform of their civil and political rights had gained ground since 1900, opposition to feminism and to suffrage remained. Both male and female commentators found reasons to resist the progress of the feminists, though for different reasons. The nature of their objections usually fell into one of three categories. Men usually based their objections either on social/moral grounds, fearing the impact feminism might have on families or society; or on biological/natural grounds, arguing that women were inherently unsuited to anything beyond the maternal realm. While the vigor with which adherents of these arguments made their case

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[222] "Biblioteca del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 18 March 1924, p. 9. Courses included reading, oration, shorthand, accounting, calligraphy, and foreign languages.

[223] "Informe de la secretaria del interior sobre la celebración de las bodas de plata del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 25:94-5, May 1926, p. 16.

varied, feminists remained firm in their attitudes, refusing to accept counter-arguments. Women who opposed feminism usually focused their attention on the problems in the case for suffrage. Some anarchist feminists objected to the very idea of voting in the belief that it upheld a hopelessly corrupt system. Other critics of suffragism simply believed that the pursuit of the vote was a waste of time- the women of Argentina simply were not ready for it, and they could spend their time and energy more productively elsewhere. In both cases, women usually did not dispute that women could and should play a role in the public sphere. However, they, like the Council, simply advanced a different set of priorities from those that advocated suffrage. The overall impact of male and female opponents to women's suffrage was to counteract the increasingly vocal pro-reform movement.

In making their case for Civil Code reform and suffrage, feminists emphasized the benefits to society and the moral solidity of women and the home; opponents responded with prophecies of doom for the social and moral fabric of country, family and all women. The traditional locus for this critique was the Catholic Church, which feminists saw as an "irreducible enemy of the juridical, social, and political emancipation of women."[224] Certainly there were those who used religious language to oppose feminism, describing women as "the author of sin and the loss of paradise" and therefore unfit as the bearers of moral improvement in society.[225] However, anti-feminists also made use of historical examples to make their case. One such critic began with a premise that no feminist would dispute: "the true woman is the base of the family, and this, in turn, is the foundation of all nations." He then asserted that the Roman Empire collapsed through:

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[224] F.A Barrotaventa in Font, *La mujer*…, 42-3.

[225] Lucas Ayarragaray, "Algunas fases de la mujer argentina," *La Nación*, 9 September 1924.

> …the corruption of the home. The Roman matrons prostituted themselves when they replaced the virtue of Cornelia with the lewdness of Clovis. In our age the same may happen if we exchange the woman of the home for the woman of the forum- that is to say, the woman that in her desire to pursue more learning and more liberties attempts to act in the public square as men do, attempts to overturn nature by serving in civil office herself…A woman is immoral when she replaces a man in the struggle for individual and social improvement, because demanding this active role is a deviation from her path.[226]

The very existence of feminism therefore threatened the health of the nation. In addition to harming society, women risked turning themselves into "caricatures of men and caricatures of women" when they participated in politics. For these critics, feminism represented a dangerous trend- one that would bring no benefits to offset the damage it did.[227] These predictions flew in the face of the optimistic assessment of suffragists who believed that suffrage would bring needed reform to society while enhancing women's "natural" role.

For other critics of feminism, nature lay at the heart of their concerns. These anti-feminists perceived gender roles, and women's supposed inferiority, as biologically determined- any attempt to alter those roles signified an aberration in the person concerned.[228] A woman who entered the public sphere risked transforming herself, both literally and figuratively, into an unnatural combination of male and female. Were this to take place on a sufficiently large scale, the result would be "a single sex, morally hybrid [and] having ambiguous

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[226] Luis Reyna Almandos in Font, *La mujer…*, p. 127-9.

[227] Leopoldo Lugones in Font, *La mujer…*, p. 97; O. Magnasco in Font, *La mujer…*, p. 93.

[228] Ramon Vaquer, "Psicología de la mujer," in *Generación consciente y divulgación científica* (Buenso Aires: n.p., n.d), 1-2.

characteristics appropriate to its ambiguous gender."[229] Others compared feminism to a disease, slowly spreading and "sterilizing…[and] inflaming the spark of degeneration" in humanity. Feminists responded to these attacks with reminders that male alcoholism and sexual promiscuity posed far greater risks of "degeneration" to the human race than the activities of a few women seeking to improve their sex. Some even went so far as to assert that there already existed "an alarming mediocrity on the part of the 'elevated sex'" that feminists sought to surpass. Others reminded their critics that studies on intellect showed no significant differences between the sexes, and that women possessed a physical strength essential to the health of humanity- the ability to bear children.[230] Nevertheless, the biological arguments tapped into a visceral fear of gender confusion that feminists could not easily overcome. Such arguments could lead male and female feminists alike to moderate their arguments, convinced that full legal equality between men and women did not yet suit Argentine society.

There had always been feminists in Argentina who had opposed the idea of suffrage, mainly among the Anarchists and Conservatives. These feminists argued that, just as the poor sought to imitate the rich, so women seeking the vote sought to imitate men through traditional politics. While confident that such efforts would eventually succeed, "in the matter of emancipation they will not

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[229] Lucas Ayarragaray, "Algunas fases de la mujer argentina," *La Nación*, 9 September 1924. Ayarragaray connected feminism and the resultant hybdirization with "materialist socialism", in opposition to the "positivist thesis of differentiation" that brought true progress.

[230] María Lacerda de Moura, *¿La mujer es una degenerada?* (Buenos Aires: Luz y Vida, 1925) 19-21; Hermina L. de Roth in Font, *La mujer…*, 68; Daniel Gómez, "Feminismo y cuestión social," *La Protesta*, 29 February 1908; Adelina Martínez Lantero, "Sufragio universal y voto femenino," *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:9, 29 September 1910, p. 411; "Charla femenina," *Unión y Labor*, 3:32, May 1912, p. 20; Alicia Moreau, "La inferioridad de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 9:1, September 1916, p. 16-7; "La mujer y su situación en la vida moderna," *La mujer y la casa*, November 1919, p. 5.

advance anything."[231] However, most feminists opposed to suffrage did so on the basis that the women of Argentina, at least for the time being, were not ready for full political participation on an equal basis with men. Some worried that the vote would be "a new motive for discord" within families, or that wives would simply echo the vote of their husbands, making the whole exercise pointless. Others felt that most, if not all, women required much more intensive education and training in order to use political rights effectively. While some commentators observed that men had voted for years without such preparation, the concern over poorly-educated female voters led others to favor a limited suffrage, stalling truly equal voting rights to a later date. One of the most eloquent commentators on this point, the author Hermina Brumana, combined all of these points. In her opinion, the very act of seeking the vote was an acknowledgement of inferiority on the part of women, who should shun politics as a means of improvement. Brumana viewed politics (including the creation of feminist groups) as a bad habit of men- much like smoking or drinking- one that would damage the home and the moral health of women. Thus, she did not object to the idea that women were indeed unprepared for the vote- this was as it should be. These varying perspectives among individuals that in all other respects could be considered advocates of women's rights certainly presented a challenge to the pro-suffrage feminists.[232] However, despite the persistence of anti-suffrage sentiment, by the mid-1920's a firm consensus had developed around a critical goal- the reform of the Civil Code.

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[231] "El sufragio femenino," *El Libertario*, 19 June 1920; Ricardo Castellanos in Font, *La mujer…*, p. 171-2.

[232] Luisa Israel de Portela in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 177; Juan Ignacio Cedoya in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 121-2; Hermina Brumana in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 181-6; Elia M. Martinez in in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 158--9; Elvira López in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 132-3; Rodolfo Medina in Font, *La mujer…,* p. 61; Abeijón and Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina…*, p. 54.

Success of the Civil Code Reform

Since the initial reform project of 1902, deputies and senators had made periodic attempts at changing the Civil Code throughout the 1910's and early 20's. At first, these projects came from the earlier project authors, deputies Luis Drago and Alfredo Palacios, and passed to committees with little notice or debate. However, in 1918 Senator Enrique del Valle Iberlucea introduced the first Civil Code reform bill into that chamber.[233] The briefly worded legislation declared that women "enjoy full use of civil rights" and that any laws to the contrary would henceforth cease to exist.[234] In addition, del Valle supported his proposal with an extensive speech that presaged the arguments used to support the suffrage project the following year. For example, he observed that "the most civilized nations of Europe, America and Oceania" already enjoyed such equality and that "the terrible war that afflicts the entire world today has revealed the great and noble aptitude of women in the social economy." In general, del Valle believed that the women of Argentine were ready to take on the responsibilities of civil equality, observing both the necessity of such rights in a modern economy and the moral strength of women. While acknowledging that "it would be useless to dispute that women's place is uniquely in the home," he refused to accept that they were in any way inferior to men, citing J. S. Mill, Krause, and Bebel to support his assertion. Nevertheless, the growing presence of women in the workplace required a change in the laws to accommodate their needs. Del Valle even linked the women's movement to labor mobilization, showing how both

[233] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1914*, v. 4, p. 878; Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1915*, v. 1, p. 657-8.

[234] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1918*, v. 1, p. 38.

workers and women could gain their just rights through organized action.[235] Despite his extensive arguments, del Valle's project ultimately languished in committee, as did subsequent projects in 1919, 1920, 1922 and 1924.[236] However, these projects went hand-in-hand with the growing public discussion of Civil Code reform. Finally, in 1925, the process that led to definite reform commenced.

In June of 1925, the Chamber of Deputies, the origin of nearly all of the Civil Code projects thus far, invited the Senate to appoint members to a joint commission on Civil Code reform. Socialist Mario Bravo accepted the invitation, and served as chair of the commission. Over the next three months, the commission studied the previous projects, and produced a consensus bill that it then submitted to the Chamber of Deputies. This project granted all unmarried women the same civil rights as men, and listed the civil rights that married women would enjoy henceforth. These included the right to work, testify in court, and spend her own money without spousal permission, legal control over her children from a previous marriage (as no divorce law yet existed, presumably this only applied to widows), and freedom from any debts her spouse might accrue unrelated to care of the family.[237] While this project eventually succeeded, the Chamber of Deputies appeared to be in no rush to consider the project. Almost a full year passed before full consideration of the commission's work began. The

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[235] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1918*, v. 1, p. 45-78.

[236] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1919*, v. 2, p. 841-2; Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1920*, v. 1, p. 537-63; Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1922*, v. 2, p. 8-9, v. 3, p. 460, v. 4, p. 458 and v. 5, 498-511.

[237] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1925*, v. 1, p. 183-4 and v. 2, p. 457.

intervening period allowed the various deputies to fully consider the proposal and hear the arguments both for and against its adoption.

By this point, very few commentators objected to the idea of Civil Code reform. Entities as divergent as the Socialist Party and the National Council of Women supported the idea, as did the mainstream press. All agreed that the time was ripe for such a reform, and the decried the "fear of ideas" that had delayed it thus far.[238] However, this fear had not entirely disappeared. At least one commentator described the reform as "absurd" since marriage itself implied submitting one's will to that of another. Reform therefore meant that the very definition of marriage would be in jeopardy.[239] These lingering doubts did not reflect the general consensus, and the debates finally got underway in August of 1926.

The three-day debates that took place in the Chamber of Deputies mirrored that which had taken place in the press. Almost all of those who spoke did so to defend the reform and explain its necessity. In the end, the bill passed with an overwhelming majority. Those who did object voiced their concerns in a variety of ways. Some worried that the law as written might lead to lawsuits pitting wife against husband over matters of debt. Others believed that it would only assist "a few privileged families" in practice, doing almost nothing for middle or working class women. Neither of these deputies rejected the bill as a whole. Ultimately, only one deputy absolutely refused to back the bill, wielding the old

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[238] "Proderechos civiles de la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 11 August 1926; "Derechos civiles de la mujer," *La Prensa*, 17 August 1926; Fanny Carmen de Cantón, "Informe de la comisión de derechos civiles," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 25:91-3, November 1925, p. 67. At least three organizations, the Gran Logia Nacional Argentina, the Socialist Women's Center, and the College of Lawyers of Buenos Aires sent petitions to Congress in favor of the project. Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 3, p. 841 and 864; *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 4, p. 8.

[239] José Correnzo Urdapilleta, "Igualdad civil de la mujer," *La Prensa*, 15 August 1926.

argument that it would disrupt family life without providing any benefits.[240] The bill's principle defenders, Socialists Enrique Dickmann and Antonio de Tomasso, used well established arguments to assuage these lingering doubts and reassure their colleagues of the reform's importance. Dickmann, for example, asserted that "women are biologically more conservative in the best sense of the term" than men and would not allow reform to disrupt the family. De Tomasso, on the other hand, critiqued the old code as hastily rendered and illustrated how "social forces" made reform essential for the nation as a whole to progress.[241] The final version of the reform passed the Deputies on September 1, 1926 and the Senate two weeks later. While some journals, notably the Socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia*, celebrated the success of reform, the law seemed to attract little notice overall.[242] While this meager reaction seems to support the idea of women in general as apathetic towards reform, it also proves that few seriously objected to it either. In any case, with the reform feminists could now refocus their efforts on suffrage and other issues. Within a year of the Civil Code reform, they would find a surprisingly receptive audience for their arguments in the western province of San Juan.

Conclusion

The years following the international women's conferences of 1910 and the fragmentation of the National Women's Council saw both new opportunities

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[240] The deputy in question was José Ferri of Santa Fe. Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 3, p. 855; *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 4, p. 49 and 376.

[241] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 4, p. 40-44, 58.

[242] Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 1, p. 639-49; "Derechos civiles a la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 15 September 1926, p. 4; "El Senado dejó aprobado el proyecto sancionado en diputados de derecho civiles de la mujer," *La Nación*, 15 September 1926.

and new challenges for feminism. The passage of the Sáenz Peña law, the growth of new women's organizations, the election of Hipólito Yrigoyen, and the flood of suffrage laws in Europe and North America following World War I raised expectations for changes in the legal status of women in Argentina. On the other hand, the continued unwillingness of women's groups to cross ideological lines, debates within groups and the specter of social upheaval, particularly following the *semana trágica*, impeded the women's movement. Despite these setbacks, a growing national consensus in favor of reform eventually led to a critical victory for feminism- the reform of the Civil Code. This act struck down a major obstacle for women and raised hopes for political equality as well. However, the old obstacles of division within the movement and resistance (or apathy) from outside of it would continue to pose a problem.

The fragmentation of the women's movement proved both blessing and curse during the 1910's and early 1920's. On one hand, the multiplicity of feminist organizations and arguments meant that they could reach a wide range of individuals. Though their priorities differed, the fact that feminism existed within all of the major parties and ideologies of the nation meant that all sectors of the political system heard some form of the argument that women could and should enjoy some role in the public sphere. The result was a growing consensus that made it a simple matter for Civil Code reform to pass. On the other hand, the divergence of opinions also made the direction feminism should take in Argentina murky at best. Political reform by no means appealed to all feminists, and those who did seek it did not necessarily agree on tactics or leadership. The continued divergence between Radical, Socialist, and Lanteri's independent feminism, only briefly transcended in the National Feminist Union, demonstrated this lack of unity. While this by no means blocked the Civil Code reform, it did make it difficult to build a mass following behind the idea of feminism. While feminists shared more often than not agreed on basic

principles, their fragmentation meant that feminism belonged to all parties and to none.

Following the Civil Code victory of 1926, pro-suffrage feminists had the opportunity to pursue voting rights with greater focus and vigor. The precedent of Civil Code reform provided an opportunity to apply the arguments and support for suffrage to political rights as well. Though Conservatives continued to resist the idea, the growing consensus on basic feminist principles made the prospect of a suffrage law more and more probable. However, just as events beyond the control of feminist, or any other sector of Argentine society, shaped the progress of women's rights, so would they limit the advance of their cause in the coming two decades. In the wake of the Great Depression, the suffragists, who had seemed poised for victory, suddenly suffered a devastating reversal of fortune as an archconservative government seized power.

Illustration 5- Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto with husband Nicolás, 1913. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 6- Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw at the 1919 election. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Chapter IV
Progress and Setbacks, 1927-1943

> It cannot be denied that in this Country women are as capable politically as men. The new intellectual and manual activities that the modern woman has undertaken in the last ten years have left no room for doubt in respect to the degree of interest they have shown in public issues…the teachers, university students, employees, workers, artists, writers, etc. that currently exist and that keep increasing in number…allow us to affirm that the superior destiny of women in the world- that of being a mother- is not incompatible with the intelligent exercise of political rights.
> -La Prensa[243]

> Equal rights between men and women, as lovers of suffrage want, from the point of view of both laws and customs, would be the most punishing dart hurled at morality, already on its deathbed. This arrow would be all the crueler for coming from the hand of women, who should be morality's most ardent guardians. Such pretension would be a disruption that, instead of changing the traditional prejudices of men, would give rise to an effort [by women] to equal them in their vices.
> -Adela T. de Cassinelli[244]

Following the Civil Code Reform in 1926, the women's rights movement in Argentina appeared ready to advance another critical change- the implementation of suffrage. The Civil Code Reform had passed Congress with minimal objections- only one member of the Chamber of Deputies had voted against it as a matter of principle.[245] The ideological fragmentation of the women's movement did not, ultimately, prevent the reform from succeeding.

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[243] "Los derechos políticos de la mujer," *La Prensa*, 14 September 1929.

[244] Adela T. de Cassinelli, "El alcoholismo: terrible flagelo de la humanidad," *Acción Femenina*, 5:5, 20 November 1936, p. 7.

[245] Typically, Deputies and Senators voted on a bill in general, then on each article individually, allowing for amendments. A bill officially passed when the last article received a majority vote.

Indeed, the various women's groups of the nation all agreed on the importance of Civil Code reform, though not all pursued it with equal vigor. This consensus on reform allowed the law, which various feminists had sought for over two decades, to pass with such seeming ease. However, such agreement did not exist for women's suffrage. While the Socialists, Radical feminists and Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw's Feminist Party continued to make the case for suffrage, Conservative as well as Anarchist feminists continued to discredit the notion (Anarchists simply did not support the idea of elections). While a growing body of "civilized" nations had adopted suffrage, Conservatives continued to insist that Argentina as a whole was not ready for such a change. Only a local demonstration of women's readiness to vote could disprove this argument.

Fortunately for the pro-suffrage feminists, a demonstration was not long in coming, one that presaged the national law of 1947. In the early 1920's, Radical Party leader Federico Cantoni broke from the national organization and formed his own, independent faction of the Radicals known as the "intransigente," "Bloquista," or "Cantonista" Party. This Party, which included ex-Socialists as well as Radicals, came to dominate politics in the western province of San Juan throughout the 1920's and early 30's in defiance of the Radical Party based in Buenos Aires. In 1927, Cantoni rewrote the Constitution of the province to suit himself (the elected Constitutional Committee consisted almost entirely of Cantonistas). Among the changes was an article that specifically included women as eligible voters in all municipal and provincial elections. This action demonstrated that the Cantonistas had adopted feminist reform in their program and demonstrated their political strength- vocal opposition to the suffrage amendment was minimal. The suffrage reform, which Cantoni brought about without the benefit of a strong local feminist movement, came as a windfall for suffrage advocates throughout Argentina. However, the lack of a local political movement among women in San Juan did not mean that women failed to take

advantage of their new rights. In the first election in San Juan under the new Constitution, women participated in an orderly fashion without any serious complications (though there were accusations of fraud), and the new voters largely favored the Bloquistas. This gave feminists in favor of voting rights a powerful, concrete argument in their favor, as San Juan's government and society continued to function without any difficulty following the reform. Twenty years later, the Peronists experienced similar controversy and triumph with their suffrage law (which they later enshrined in the new national constitution of 1949). The quick succession of Civil Code reform and the San Juan Constitution strengthened the women's movement as nothing else before.[246]

Capitalizing on their successes of 1926 and 1927, feminists renewed the drive for a national suffrage law. A bill appeared in the Chamber of Deputies that the press and politicians alike praised. In 1929, feminists got another boost from the success of a women's suffrage law in Ecuador- the first of its kind in all of South America.[247] As with the Civil Code reform, few members of Congress voiced any opposition to the project, and nearly three decades of effort seemed at the point of victory. Unfortunately for the feminists, as the suffrage law began to make its way through Congress, a coup, prompted by the Great Depression, overthrew the second government of Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930. When elections and democratic forms of government returned in 1932, the political outlook for

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[246] A constitutional reform in Santa Fe granted women municipal suffrage in that province, but due to political conflict the reform did not take effect until the late 1937. See Celso Ramon Lorenzo and Rodolfo Scholer, *La constitución santafesina de 1921* (Santa Fe: Amsafe, 1997), 5-7, 14; "Una petición interesante," *Nuestra Causa*, 3:24, 275; "En la convención constituyente de Santa Fe," *Nuestra Causa*, 3:24, 273-4; "Campaña catolica contra las reformas introducidas en la constitución," *La Razón*, 17 August 1921; "Restablecimiento del regimen municipal en Santa Fe," *La Prensa*, 15 December 1937; "Continua la preparación de los comicios municipales," *La Nación*, 15 August 1938.

[247] The Ecuador law, while the first national law, did not give women the vote on the same basis of men. As in Argentina, male suffrage was obligatory, but the 1929 reform made female suffrage optional. Ecuadorian women won equal suffrage in 1946.

feminism had changed dramatically. In that year, the suffragists came closer to success than ever before. A joint congressional committee produced a project that won approval in the Chamber of Deputies. However, the Senate ultimately refused to consider the law, sending it to committee, where it remained. This action came to characterize the political climate of the 1930's in Argentina, an era that became notorious for shady politics.

The 1930's, also known as the *Década Infame* (infamous decade), saw an attempt to restore the Conservative monopoly of power preceding the Sáenz Peña law. Electoral corruption revived, and the governments of the era demonstrated an overt hostility to the more progressive movements of the day, feminism included. Strong support for the idea of women's suffrage remained, and many parties now officially included women's suffrage in their platforms. However, the government stonewalled on the subject, and at times even appeared ready to attempt undoing the Civil Code reform of 1926. To make matters worse for the feminists, many of the early, dynamic leaders of the movement either passed away or faded from the scene. Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, Julieta Lanteri, and Cecilia Grierson had all died by 1934 and Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane resigned her position in the National Council of Education and went into retirement as her health worsened. Of the first generation of feminist leaders only Alicia Moreau de Justo, now a widow, continued to advocate feminist issues in the 1930's and 40's. Although new women leaders, most notably the famous author Victoria Ocampo, took up the cause, much of the impetus had gone out of feminism. While suffrage laws continued to appear in Congress, the old pattern of sending them to committee returned as well. Feminism, though by no means defeated, appeared stalled in Argentina.

As World War II approached, new possibilities for the women's movement appeared, once again fueled by outside events. Over the 1930's, four other Latin American nations, including neighboring Uruguay and Brazil, enacted suffrage

laws, as did the old mother country, Spain.[248] This further reinforced the argument that Argentine society could indeed handle female voters. The style of government that implemented these suffrage laws also set an important precedent for Argentina. In general, these nations gave women the vote following times of considerable political upheaval. The governments created by these crises tend to fit under the heading of "populist", which means that they sought to build a broad coalition that could exclude the traditional elite of the nation. For these nations, including women in the electorate made sense as a political tactic- women's suffrage doubled the number of available voters in a stroke. Populists also bought into the notion that women were inherently moral and conservative- hence stable, a much-needed quality in uncertain times. In Argentina during the Infamous Decade such reinforcement of the political order served no purpose. However, in 1943 a group of frustrated military officers staged a coup that paved the way for the populist regime of Juan Domingo Perón. Even before Perón became president in 1946, this new government showed signs that it favored women's suffrage legislation. This in turn set the stage for the long-awaited triumph of women's suffrage.

Suffrage in San Juan[249]

The origins of women's suffrage in San Juan extended many decades prior to the 1927 constitution. As early as the 1830s the provincial government

[248] The other two Latin American nations were Cuba and El Salvador. The Franco government of Spain revoked women's suffrage following their Civil War, and it did not return until after his death in 1976.

[249] Due to an earthquake in 1944, original documents for the history of San Juan prior to that year are rare. I have used original documents to the extent possible, relying on secondary sources where necessary.

permitted female property owners to cast ballots in municipal and certain provincial elections. In 1856, the new constitution of the province confirmed this participation, and subsequent election laws made it clear that women could vote in any municipal election in the province. What is not clear is the rationale for this participation. Some historians have suggested that a gender imbalance in the province may account for this unprecedented presence of women in local politics. Men in San Juan spent a great deal of time away from home, seeking work or serving in the military. Women would therefore step in on behalf of their husbands in order to represent their interests. However, other provinces would have faced similar problems at that time yet did not resort to similar solutions. Regardless, female voting in San Juan remained a constant well into the twentieth century, without any apparent conflict.[250] However, no one made a serious effort to expand on those voting rights until the Cantoni brothers took power in the mid 1920s.

The process leading to the ascension of the Cantoni brothers, Federico, Elio, and Aldo, provides a window into the intense rivalries and personality conflicts that frequently invaded Argentine provincial politics. In the 1916 presidential election, San Juan numbered among the provinces that voted against Hipólito Yrigoyen. As so many of his predecessors had done when a provincial government went against him, Yrigoyen "intervened" the province, assigning a temporary governor or interventor until a new election could take place. In this instance, the intervention gave rise to a fragmentation of the local

[250] "Las mujeres jachalleras fueron las primeras en votar en el país," *El Nuevo Diario*, 1 November 2002; Angela Marinque de Ramírez, "Voto femenino," *Boletín Informativo del Archivo General de la Provincia*, 4:16, 1997, p. 16; Horacio Videla, *Historia de San Juan*, v. 4 (San Juan: Universidad Católica de Cuyo, 1976), 489; Horacio Videla, *Historia de San Juan*, v. 5 (San Juan: Universidad Católica de Cuyo, 1976), 224-5; Instituto de Derecho Público*, Las constituciones de San Juan* (San Juan: Universidad Católica de Cuyo, 1981), 67-8; Aldo Armando Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1948), 9; Archivo General de la provincia, carpeta 12, doc. 1, p. 4.

Radical Party. Some wished to remain loyal to Yrigoyen, while two other factions, one consisting of former Popular Party members and the other led by Federico Cantoni, refused to submit to rule from Buenos Aires. This provoked a second intervention in 1919, with Yrigoyen's chosen candidate, Amable Jones, winning as governor. However, the provincial legislature continued under Cantonista dominance, and in 1920 Jones dissolved it, provoking yet another intervention and an outbreak of violence that culminated in Jones' assassination in 1921. Cantoni himself avoided any blame for the murder, and in 1923 he finally took office as governor. Controversy continued to surround the new governor, making his term in office a difficult one. Cantoni's opponents continued to challenge his policies, slowing his desired reforms in workplace regulations and public works projects.

While this crisis played out, the youngest Cantoni, Aldo, had completed his medical degree in Buenos Aires and had joined the Socialist Party there. However, by the end of 1921 he had abandoned the party and returned to San Juan, where he assisted his brother in his bid for governor. When Federico won the election in 1923, Aldo became a senator for the province, helping to confirm the dominance of the Bloquistas. For the next three years, the Cantonis pursued a pro-labor agenda that favored an active government role in the economy. These reforms proved highly controversial despite their popularity among workers and provoked dissent and controversy both locally and nationally. Finally, the province again suffered intervention in 1926 in response to accusations of corruption.[251] In the election that followed, Aldo replaced his brother as governor, and it was he that called for the constitutional convention of the following year. This convention, designed to completely revise the provincial

[251] "La nueva protesta contra el gobierno de San Juan," *La Prensa*, 13 February 1924.

constitution, provided the Cantoni's with an opportunity to make their mark on the province permanent.[252]

Although Federico Cantoni led the political movement that bore his family name, Aldo proved to be the motivating force behind the inclusion of women's voting rights in the Bloquista platform and the new constitution.[253] His experience in the Socialist Party naturally included exposure to that organization's ideas and arguments on the subject of women's rights. According to his wife and biographer Rosalina Plaza, Aldo Cantoni followed Juan Justo's vision of socialism, further suggesting contact with, if not acceptance of, the ideas of Socialist feminists such as Alicia Moreau de Justo. Plaza also claims that Aldo only left the Socialist Party because of infighting, and he joined his brother's organization "without ever renouncing the ideas of true and legitimate socialism that Dr. Justo gave him in the capital of the Republic years before."[254] Cantoni himself made it clear that, at least in terms of women's suffrage, he continued to agree with his former comrades. In his inaugural address as governor, Aldo Cantoni announced the formation of the constitutional convention in order to fulfill the objectives his brother would have tackled if not for the "infinite social, political and economic problems [his government] faced every day." Women's voting rights came at the top of his list of reforms for the convention to address.[255]

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[252] Rosalina Plaza de Cantoni, *Aldo Cantoni en mi recuerdo* (San Juan: Instituto Salesiano de Artes Gráficos, 1974), 9; Horacio Videla, *Historia de San Juan* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1984), 249-71; Carmen Peñaloza de Varese and Hector D. Arias, *Historia de San Juan* (Mendoza: Spadoni, 1966), 428-64; José P. Barreiro, *La provincia de San Juan: su transformación política y social, 1923-8* (San Juan: n.p., 1928), 5-12; P. José Gallardo, *Definición doctrinaria del bloquismo San Juanino* (Rosario: Americana, 1932), 10-18, 55; Juan Alberto Bracamonte, *Una vergüenza nacional: el cantonismo en documentos* (Buenos Aires: L.J Rosso, 1927), 21.

[253] Barreiro, *La provincia de San Juan…,* 24.

[254] Plaza de Cantoni, *Aldo Cantoni…*, 22-3; Susana Ramella de Jefferies, *El radicalismo bloquista en San Juan* (San Juan: Gobierno de la Provincia de San Juan, 1985), 336-8.

[255] "El discurso del Dr. Aldo Cantoni leido ante la asamblea legislativa," *La Reforma*, 6 December 1926. Other proposed reforms included removing all remaining obstacles to suffrage for men and

Before these reforms could occur, the government had to establish the convention.

Just over a month after Aldo Cantoni began his term as governor, elections for the Constitutional Convention took place. The speed with which the government organized the election and the irregularities with which officials conducted the vote led the Cantonis' opponents to cry fraud and refuse their participation.[256] However, this confrontation barely registered with the government, and the convention proceeded as planned with a twelve-member body consisting of nine Bloquistas (Federico and Elio Cantoni included), two Socialists, and one member of the Progressive Democrat Party.[257] It was one of the Socialists, Arturo Storni, who initiated the debates on female voting rights. He praised the idea of including women's suffrage, saying it would place San Juan "at the same height as nearly all of the most cultured, free, and progressive countries of the entire world." He also reminded the assembly that the Socialists had advocated just such a reform for years, and urged his colleagues to guarantee that the voting lists for women be drawn up in a similar fashion as the (obligatory) male lists in order to prevent corruption. The sole opponent of the reform, Progressive Democrat Ventura Larrosa, followed Storni. He accepted the idea of "civic rights" for women in principle, but argued that this was neither the time nor the place- women had to be better prepared for the vote, and in any case national suffrage should come first. Finally the Bloquistas had their say.

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women alike and guarantees of worker rights including limits on work hours, minimum wage, right to organize, and health and safety regulations. All of these reforms found a place in the 1927 constitution. Cantoni also supported the repression of alcohol and gambling, another idea he shared with the Socialists.

[256] "Las elecciones de convencionales," *Diario Nuevo*, 11 January 1927; "La defensa del partido Cantonista," *Diario Nuevo*, 1 January 1927; "Indiferencia cívica," *Diario Nuevo*, 6 January 1927; "Los derechos y garantías se amplian en San Juan," *La Vanguardia*, 5 February 1927.

[257] Videla, *Historia de San Juan*, 271-2. Aldo Cantoni, as governor, could not participate in the convention directly.

First, Graciano Reca dismissed Larrosa's arguments, asserting that women "have lived through and been in touch with the most delicate and emotional moments of San Juan's political life" and therefore had earned the right to vote. As to national precedent, he declared that "we in the majority are proud of being realists and localists" and therefore did not concern themselves with national, or even international, opinion on the matter.

However, it fell to Federico Cantoni to make the most elaborate case for women's suffrage on behalf of his Party. He reiterated Reca's points, and added that it did not matter that England or the United States gave women the vote, only that "the actions of our women demand this reform." He detailed the strong interest and support women had given to the leaders of the province and the nation since the independence wars, and compared women's moral capacity favorably to that of men:

> Men often misunderstand the necessities of the home…and may have no scruples about going to get drunk in a bar, if he is poor, or a club, if rich. But women, mothers, stay in the home and dedicate themselves not only to securing their family's daily bread, to providing food and clothing, but also raising the children, guiding them, educating them, and in the hardest and most difficult circumstances her sacrifices save the family from moral ruin or economic catastrophe. In this way, women in general and those of our province especially know and feel what the people need for their welfare and can, for the same reason, know how to satisfy the collective desires for improvement and which man can, from the government, best interpret those desires.

By the same token, women would resist corruption and facilitate clean elections.[258] In total, Cantoni's arguments brought together many of the

[258] Instituto de Derecho Público, *Las constituciones…*, 626-33; Honorable Convención Reformadora, *Actas* (San Juan: n.p, 1927), 58. The Bloquista press singled out Larrosa for his opposition to suffrage, calling him an "irreducible enemy of the skirt" and suggesting that his own personal inadequacies made him reject women's rights- "Un enemigo de la mujer," *La Reforma*, 9 February 1927.

prevailing rationales for suffrage at the national level- foreign and domestic precedent, the readiness of women to vote, and above all the strong moral quality of women that suffragists considered analogous to the maternal role. In the end, these arguments went almost unopposed, as the suffrage article passed with only one dissenting vote. The lack of dissent on the matter of women's suffrage suggests a strong acceptance of the basic ideas of feminism, much like the case of Civil Code reform.

Yet unlike that national case, the involvement of women's groups in the province appeared to be minimal. These groups chiefly consisted of social aid and educational organizations, without any connection to the pro-suffrage feminists. Indeed, the only national women's organization to have a presence in the province was the National Council of Women, which had yet to seriously discuss, let alone endorse, the idea of suffrage. To be sure, women in San Juan could make their voices heard. For example, female teachers organized to petition the government for pay increases to get them through tough economic times. Other groups solicited funding for hospitals or for "agricultural homes" designed to teach young women important rural skills. None of these groups expressed an opinion on the matter of suffrage, however.[259]

While the introduction of women's suffrage into the San Juan constitution elicited few remarks prior to the end of the convention, the aftermath saw an outpouring of commentary. Before the convention, the Bloquista newspaper *La*

[259] Letter to the president of the Sociedad Madres Cristianas, Archivo General de la Provincia, Carpeta 42, doc.. 2, 7 March 1927; National Council of Women to the Governor of San Juan, Archivo General de la Nación, carpeta 85, doc. 50, 20 December 1917; Ministry of Foreign Relations and Cutlure to the Ministry of Government and Public Instruction, Archivo General de la Provincia, carpeta 66, doc. 10, 25 September 1923 and 24 February 1899; Asociación de Maestros Sarmiento to Ministry of Government and Public Instruction, Archivo General de la Provincia, carpeta 66, doc. 12, 5 October 1921; "Las escuelas profesionales," *La Reforma*, 15 May 1924; "Las escuelas de hogar agrícola serán una realidad," *La Reforma*, 23 February 1927; "Serán más mujeres, porque terndrán mayores motivos de atracción al hogar," *La Reforma*, 17 October 1927; "En las flores inauguróse la de Hogar Agrícola," *La Reforma*, 22 February 1928.

Reforma and the opposition *Diario Nuevo* expressed contradictory opinions on the suffrage proposal. *La Reforma,* naturally, reiterated the arguments of the Cantoni brothers themselves, and stood solidly in favor of women's voting rights.[260] *Diario Nuevo*, by contrast, printed articles, letters and interviews with a more diverse perspective. On the one hand, they published opinions that women "preferred the tranquility of the home" to political activity and that men did not wish for women that were "partisans of the English suffragettes" any more than they wanted those that were "frivolous" or "coquettes."[261] On the other hand, *Diario Nuevo* also published letters from those that felt women would be "more comprehensive, more practical, more good and just" than men and would therefore vote in superior candidates.[262] After the reform, the Cantoni's received considerable praise from national figures and the press. Foremost among these was the Socialist paper *La Vanguardia*, which hailed the suffrage article as "the most important clause of the new San Juan constitution." This constitution, the editors declared, now made the national constitution an "anachronism."[263] While partisan bias often colored this praise, the overall reaction to the reform was undeniably positive, as was the anticipation leading to the first election with female participation.

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[260] "La mujer en la reforma constitucional," *La Reforma*, 17 October 1924; "Glosando la reforma a la constitución: los derechos civiles y políticas de la mujer," *La Reforma*, 13 January 1927; "Protección de la mujer," *La Reforma*, 4 February 1927.

[261] "El voto a la mujer," *Diario Nuevo,* 18 January 1927; "La mision de la mujer," *Diario Nuevo,* 21 January 1927; "El voto a la mujer," *Diario Nuevo,* 8 January 1927; "Las elecciones de convencionales," *Diario Nuevo,* 11 January 1927.

[262] "Cuando voten las mujerres," *Diario Nuevo,* 12 January 1927; "Las mujeres y el proceso," *Diario Nuevo,* 29 January 1927; "Las elecciones de convencionales," *Diario Nuevo,* 11 January 1927.

[263] "La nueva constitución de San Juan," *La Vanguardia*, 15 February 1927; "Delegaciones a San Juan," *La Vanguardia*, 11 February 1927; "De la Doctora Julieta Lanteri," *La Reforma*, 11 February 1927; "Un enemigo de la mujer," *La Reforma*, 9 February 1927; Faustiano J. Legón, *Momentario de la nueva constitución de San Juan* (Buenos Aires: Juridica, 1927), 77-8.

In 1928, the women of San Juan got their first chance to put their new rights into practice. The enrollment of the new voters had taken place several months before the election without incident, and the Cantonistas entered the polls with confidence in the outcome.[264] Their opponents, in contrast, expressed even greater discontent over the conduct of these elections than for those of the constitutional convention. *Diario Nuevo* called the election "a true joke, a parody of an election without peer or precedent," asserting that government, not party, representative ran the polls, meaning the Cantonistas controlled the ballots. In the event, only the Bloquistas and the Socialists actually participated. Regardless, women participated in relatively greater numbers than did men. In the city of San Juan, for example, over 85% of registered women voted vs. 73% of men- a fact that Federico Cantoni attributed to greater party mobilization and campaigning among women. The Bloquistas hailed this turnout as a "beautiful spectacle of marvelous democracy" and a "poem of triumph and beauty" written by the women of San Juan. However, the Socialists- the only other party that agreed to participate in this election- denounced the way that the Cantonistas treated male and female voters alike, producing a list of fraud and intimidation tactics used on voters throughout the province. Nevertheless, the election results stood, and the final tally showed that not only had women voted in greater numbers than men had, but they had also given greater support to the Bloquistas. While the victory of the Cantoni brothers proved short-lived (the renewed Yrigoyen government once again intervened the province later in 1928) the participation of women at the provincial level had had its debut. Though

[264] "Enrolamiento de mujeresempezará el 8 de agosto," *La Reforma*, 2 August 1927; "Declaraciónes del Doctor Federico Cantoni," *La Prensa*, 9 April 1928.

suffrage remained controversial, women continued to turn out at the polls in San Juan from that point forward.[265]

Although female voting in San Juan demonstrated that women could cast a ballot, female candidates and government officials remained rare. The Cantoni's appointed the first woman in the province, Emar Acosta, to a high-ranking job as a public defender and child welfare inspector. Acosta, who had received a law degree in Buenos Aires, became the first female representative in the provincial legislature in 1934, and therefore the first woman elected in that level of government. Acosta ran with the National Democratic Party (PDN), the conservative organization that displaced the Radicals (and the Bloquistas) after 1930. Women once again favored the party in power, and the PDN newspaper *Tribuna* celebrated the first "truly legal election" for these voters while the Bloquistas, ironically, denounced the elections as fraudulent. Nevertheless, both sides had had some agreeable experience with women's suffrage, and their complaints focused on the conduct of elections, not on the fact of female participation.[266]

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[265] "La jornada cívica del Domingo," *Diario Nuevo*, 3 April 1928 (Presidential elections took place on April 1, provincial elections on the 8th); "Los comicios de hoy," *Diario Nuevo*, 8 April 1928; "Por primera vez en el país se aplico ayer en San Juan el voto femenino," *La Prensa*, 9 April 1928; "La concurrencia de mujeres al comicio de ayer ha superado los cálculos de los más optimistas," *La Reforma*, 9 Aptil 1928; "Las mujeres de San Juan," *La Reforma*, 10 April 1928; "El Partido Socialista: resolvió anoche la abstención en los proximos comicios municipales," *Diario Nuevo*, 10 April 1928; "Fueron proclamados los electos de la Cámara de Representantes," *La Prensa*, 13 April 1928.

[266] "Una mujer en la justicia de San Juan," *Diario Nuevo*, 7 December 1926; "Conversando con la primera mujer en la juicatura Argentina," *La Reforma*, 15 December 1926; Lily Sosa de Newton, *Diccionnario birográfico de mujeres argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1986), 11; "De la Asociación Cultura Cívica de la Mujer-PDN a las ciudadanas de San Juan," *Tribuna*, 22 July 1934; "Las mujeres votantes," *La Reforma*, 23 July 1934; "La mujer en el comicio," *Tribuna*, 24 July 1934; "Dio cominezo ayer el escrutino con ventaja para el Partido D. Nacional: El voto femenino favoreció en forma amplia a esta agrupación," *Diario Nuevo*, 27 July 1934; "Dra. Emar Acosta: la primera legisladora sudamericana," *Tribuna*, 28 July 1934. Regrettably, I was unable to find records of Acosta's actions once she was in the legislature.

Women's suffrage in San Juan continued to elicit comment in Argentina in the years between its implementation and the success of national suffrage in 1947. For the most part feminists used the province as a positive example female political capacity. Julieta Lanteri, for example, praised the outcome of the 1928 election as proof that women showed more interest and ability for politics than most men did. Subsequent elections demonstrated that "women do not vote as women but rather in accordance with the interests, tendencies, and opinions of their class or group" and they did so with far more decorum than men. In short, San Juan supported feminist arguments and disproved the principal objections of their critics.[267] Nevertheless, criticism persisted from the extreme right wing and from the Catholic Church. A Church-affiliated women's group even went so far as to produce a poll demonstrating that women in San Juan would prefer not to vote. According to these respondents, voting was immoral, unfeminine, or simply inconvenient.[268] Regardless, the prevailing opinion at this time seemed to be that voting rights for women, while not the boon some had predicted, at least did no harm. Such an attitude, while doing little to advance the cause of national feminism nevertheless supported the arguments of the feminists.

The case of San Juan would prove to be an important precedent for the success of suffrage in Argentina. Not only did it provide an important case study for the effects voting might have on society and politics, but it also presaged the manner in which suffrage eventually passed. Like the Cantoni's, Perón would face questions of legitimacy in his own election. And like Cantoni, Perón

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[267] "Otra vez figura la Lanteri," *Crítica*, 28 March 1928; "Las mujeres necesiten el voto para su emancipación," *Vida Femenina*, 2:13, August 1924, p. 3; José Treviño, "El sufragio femenino en la práctica," *Vida Femenina*, 3:30, January 1936, p. 25; "Una joven sanjuanina nos habla del voto femenino," *Democracia*, 3 March 1947.

[268] "Encuesta interesante y de actualidad sobre el voto femenino," *El Porvenir*, 2 April 1939; "La infamía del voto a la mujer," *Bandera Argentina*, 7 July 1938.

benefited handsomely from his support for women's political rights, as women supported both of them more than men did. Furthermore, in both cases a strong leader made suffrage a reality. While female political candidates were far more prevalent among the Peronists than the Cantonistas, the parallels between the two are highly suggestive. However, a twenty-year gap lay between the two, during which time the apparent progress of feminism faced not only obstruction, but even the possibility of reversal.

The Period of Expectation

With the success of San Juan suffrage and the long-standing arguments and activism of suffrage feminists behind it, a national women's suffrage law appeared inevitable by the end of the 1920's. Because of this, very little changed for the for the major women's groups of the day. The suffragist feminist groups- the Socialist Women's Center, Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane's Pro-Women's Rights Association, and the National Women's Union, had all backed the Civil Code Reform and were pleased with the San Juan suffrage amendment. Julieta Lanteri and her Feminist Party also supported these changes and continued to participate in elections. Conservative groups, such as the Beneficent Society, Catholic charities, and the National Council of Women, continued to function in the realms of social aid, with political activism a secondary concern at most. These groups, regardless of ideology, maintained public awareness of a variety of women's issues. Suffrage, as one of these issues, continued to appear before Congress and by 1929 it seemed at the point of success. However, national and international events would create a crisis for the women's movement and for the nation as the Great Depression gave rise to a dramatic political shift.

Pro-suffrage feminists had every reason to be optimistic in the late 1920's and saw no need to alter their arguments or tactics. They continued to petition Congress, promoting the idea of women's capacity for action outside the home, and make the case that women were ready, willing, and able to vote. "We should recognize," wrote Socialist Mario Bravo, "that at the level of civilization we have reached, women are, directly or indirectly, an effective unit of public opinion. "We do not have the right," he continued, "to ignore the cooperation they have given or deny those who are able to act in the future as active and influential agents in the management of public interests."[269] Feminists also continued to work on an international level. The International American Conferences of the 1920's saw a groundswell of support for feminist issues. The fifth conference, held in 1923, saw broad approval for a raft of socio-economic reforms, including the protection of working mothers and children. The following conference in 1928 included a comprehensive look at women's rights throughout Latin America and suggested reforms for those countries that had yet to alter their Civil Codes, many of which still had their ultimate root in Roman law. Argentine suffragists participated in voting rights conferences as well, reaffirming the connection between their own movement and global feminism.[270]

At the local level, Julieta Lanteri continued to seek election as a means to increase awareness of women's political needs. While her party continued to appeal to women to join her as candidates, Lanteri remained the primary figure within the organization and the symbol of her cause. While depictions of her in the press ranged from sympathetic to sarcastic, her own fortunes at the polls remained consistent in that she never received more than 1400 votes. "The

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[269] Mario Bravo, *Derechos político de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1930), 42.

[270] Rafael Vehils, *Los principios socialies de la conferencia de Chapultepec* (Montevideo: Consejo Interamerricano de Comerico y Producción, 1945), 48; *Sexta conferencia internacional americana* (Washington: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1927), 58-9; "El trabajo de las mujeres y de los niños," *La Vanguardia*, 25 August 1926; Bravo, *Derechos*…, 17-8.

persistence of Dr. Lanteri," wrote one editorial in a half-admiring, half-cynical tone, " is that it has the merit of saving the almost universal male concept of female constancy…there should be a seat in the Chamber of Deputies for those 'elected by force of constancy.'" Lanteri herself was sanguine about her electoral results and the prospect of women's voting rights. "We have complete faith in the favorable evolution of our idea" she declared in one interview. "I dare say this evolution is progressing even more rapidly than we are." However, as she herself recognized, it remained the case that among the major political parties only the Socialists had yet to endorse suffrage, a support that survived a split within the Socialist Party itself. While leaders within other parties had made favorable statements on the subject, definitive official support had not yet arrived.[271]

While there may have been strong underlying support for women's suffrage among politicians, continued resistance from conservatives likely contributed to the slowness of the government to take action. In some cases, such as the National Council of Women, this resistance simply meant a lack of interest. The Council continued to uphold the dignity of women but declined to voice an opinion on what it defined as "political" issues such as San Juan suffrage. This likely confirmed the suspicion of anti-feminists that women did not care about politics. Other groups demonstrated more overt resistance to feminism. Catholic organizations, which took on an increasingly unified voice in the 1920's, vigorously opposed anything connected to "liberalism and socialism",

[271] "Partido Feminista Nacional," *La Nación*, 13 February 1924; "Partido Feminista Nacionnal: La Candidata," *El Diario*, 21 March 1924; Gregorio Garcia White, "¿Triunfará alguna vez la Dra. Lanteri?," *El Hogar*, 19 December 1924; "Partido Feminista Nacional," *La Prensa*, 23 March 1924; "Las eleccionnes de senador y diputados en el distrito federal," *La Prensa*, 5 April 1924; "Totales generales," *Crítica*, 5 May 1928; "Miss Constancia," *Crítica*, 21 February 1930; "Otra vez figura la Lanteri," *Crítica*, 28 March 1928; Miguel J. Font, ed., *La mujer: encuesta feminista argentina* (Buenos Aires: n.p. 1921?), 83-7; Horacio J. Sanguinetti, "Los Socialistas Independientes," *Todo Es Historia*, no. 101, October 1975, p. 7-22; Horacio J. Sanguinetti, "Los Socialistas Independientes: una esperanza frustrada," *Todo Es Historia*, no. 102, November 1975, p. 73-94.

including the women's movement. These opponents persisted in their arguments that female political activity was unnatural and immoral, and that women lacked the proper education to vote well in any case.[272] These arguments, while lacking in empirical rigor, resonated with deep-seated attitudes in Argentine society. However, opponents to feminism appeared to be in the minority in the late 1920's- if the Argentine public had doubts about women's rights, they largely kept it to themselves.

The opposition of Church and extreme conservatives notwithstanding, the expectations of the feminists had their next hearing in 1929- three distinct proposals made their debut almost simultaneously. Deputy José Bustillo, a Conservative, presented the first project, demonstrating that support for women's voting rights had indeed moved beyond the Socialist Party. However, his project also placed the greatest limitations on suffrage. While the voting age would remain 18 for both sexes, women would have faced a literacy requirement and would have been exempt from obligatory voting. "The vote for women," Bustillo declared, "is the abolition of a privilege unjustified by logic, and the consecration of the principle of equality before the law among human beings." Yet In his speech Bustillo betrayed a far less egalitarian mindset that explained his rationale for limiting that vote. On the one hand, he exalted the accomplishments of women, denied that they were in any way inferior to men, and anticipated their "beneficent influence" on all legislation "with repercussions for the home."[273]

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[272] "Informe de la secretaria del interior sobre la celebración de las bodas de plata del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 25:94-5, May 1926, p. 16; "Sufragio femenino," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, October 1930, p. 33; Gustavo Parra, *Antimodernidad y trabajo social: origenes y expansión del trabajo social argentino* (Lujan: Universidad Nacional Lujan, 1999), 134; Barreiro, *La provincia de San Juan…,* 48; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 62; "Otra vez figura la Lanteri," *Crítica*, 28 March 1928; Bravo, *Derechos políticos*, 6, 44-6; Lucas Ayarragaray, *Cuestiones y problemas argentinos contemporaneos* (Buenos Aires: Librería Nacional, 1930), 143.

[273] Bustillo specifically listed education, temperance, health, and consumer taxes as examples of such legislation.

However, "admitting, hypothetically, that there exists an intellectual difference between a man and a woman, it could never be as great as that between a university-educated voter and an illiterate voter. It is more democratic," Bustillo continued, "to authorize the vote for women who want the opportunity than it is to impose an obligation on men who are not inspired to do their civic duty." Finally, Bustillo argued that "in a country with a small population exposed to the influence of an inorganic cosmopolitanism, it is best for there to be a great number of native persons interested in national problems." Bustillo therefore used his women's suffrage law as a way to outline the voting law he wanted for the entire Argentine population, male or female. Consistent with Conservative Party ideology, Bustillo proposed a return to the status quo prior to the 1912 electoral reform, when the Conservatives dominated and controlled the voting process. Not surprisingly, this project met with a chilly reception in the Radical-controlled Chamber of Deputies, and met its end in committee, like so many previous suffrage projects.[274]

Two weeks after the Bustillo project had its hearing, Socialist Senator Mario Bravo put forward his proposal. This project gave the suffragists precisely what they wished- suffrage on exactly the same basis as men without the obligation of military service. Bravo attached an extensive report that summarized the principal arguments for suffrage and that served as the basis for a book on women's rights that he published the following year. He began with the assertion that all countries that had experienced "persistent democratic evolution" had given women a political role and even the Catholic Church, which "has said such absurd things about women," had accommodated female activism in its

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[274] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1929*, v. 3, p. 313-6; "Ha sido proyectado una ley concediendo el voto a la mujer," *La Nación*, 12 September 1929; "Varios diputados de la derecha proyectaron el sufragio para la mujer," *La Prensa*, 12 September 1929; "Los derechos políticos de la mujer," *La Prensa*, 14 September 1929; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 60-3.

ranks. He quoted extensively from John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* and outlined the history of international feminism and suffrage since the Seneca Falls convention of 1848. Bravo argued that women were no better or worse suited for voting than men were and that most women did not differ greatly from the men closest to them in their political attitudes. When the political "interests of women, as such" did differ from those of their husbands, Bravo argued, then "women need the vote as a guarantee of just and equal consideration." Bravo went on to consider the beneficial effects of suffrage, particularly in the fields of education and hygiene. The remainder of his analysis considered the legal history of Argentine elections, beginning with the first Argentine constitution and ending with the San Juan constitution and the Bustillo project. None of these cases, he argued, prevented women from voting- indeed, "the electoral laws that have excluded women have gone against the principle of equality the Constitution establishes" and required immediate abolition. Bravo's project also went to committee, but he would revive the project periodically in the 1930's.[275]

The final project of 1929 came from a Bloquista deputy, Belisario Albarracín, who had participated in the San Juan constitutional convention. Albarracín's project differed from Bustillo's in that voting would have been mandatory for women as it already was for men, yet the literacy requirement remained. In his speech, Albarracín justified this limitation, which the San Juan institution had not included, as an expedient designed to facilitate acceptance of the law. He observed that Great Britain had imposed its own limitations on women's suffrage at first, and later revoked those limits after the initial "timidity" had lapsed. For the most part, Albarracín used this opportunity to celebrate San

[275] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones, 1929*, v. 2 p. 498-9 and 572-85; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 72-80; Bravo, *Derechos políticos…* According to Cocca, Bravo's book sold fairly well and helped reinvigorate the women's movement.

Juan's suffrage law and praise his party, while his project ultimately failed to win any support.[276]

While all three of these projects eventually went to committee, they demonstrated a broad, non-partisan support for suffrage. Unfortunately for their authors, events conspired to prevent the full consideration of any of these projects. A year after Bustillo, Bravo, and Albarracín introduced their legislation, a military conspiracy removed the discredited government of Hipólito Yrigoyen, disrupting the normal democratic process during a period of severe economic uncertainty. The interim government of General José Uriburu represented a reactionary and anti-democratic faction within the military. Uriburu's government used a paramilitary organization, the Civic Legion, to crack down on leftists and "subversive ideas" much as the Patriotic League had done following the labor uprisings of the *semana trágica* in 1919. The Legion, like the League, used a women's committee to attempt to win over citizens through charitable activities such as food kitchens and vocational training. Thus, even this archconservative regime had a place for women in its political program, albeit a limited and subservient one.[277] However, the ongoing economic crisis facilitated Uriburu's removal and replacement by the more moderate faction of Gen. Agustín P. Justo, which allowed for elections late in 1931. Justo proved more moderate by far than Uriburu, but still represented the conservative interests that Yrigoyen and the Radicals had displaced in 1916. Ultimately, Justo prevented the Radicals from participating in the election and made sure that he and his party, the Partido Demócrata Nacional, won the majority in Congress and the presidency for

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[276] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1929*, v. 34 p. 7-10; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 84-7.

[277] Sandra McGee Deutsch, "La mujer y la derecha en Argentina, Brasil, y Chile, 1900-1940," in *Historia y Género*, ed. Dora Barrancos (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1993), 101-2.

Justo.[278] The following ten years, known as the "Infamous Decade" in Argentina, proved to be a watershed for the women's movement as new challenges and new leaders appeared.

Suffrage Legislation and the Infamous Decade

As the nation's political parties prepared for the 1931 election, each considered its platform in light of the changed political landscape. Interestingly, almost all of them chose to support women's suffrage. The Socialist Party had included women's suffrage in its program since its inception, and had remained alone in this regard until 1931. During their political conventions, both the Radicals and the Progressive Democrat Party officially endorsed women's suffrage. As for the National Democratic Party, delegates supported a proposal for limited female suffrage based on the woman's profession. Women's groups had petitioned all of the parties to support such reforms, and cheered their acceptance.[279] In spite of the reactionary Uriburu period, support for suffrage had not evaporated, and proposals for a new project appeared in Congress almost as soon as it resumed conducting business.

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[278] Jonathan Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina* (New York: Lexington Associates, 2003), 186-9; David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987: From Spannish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 216-8; Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 38-9; "Fué decretada la abstención absoluta del radicalismo," *La Argentina*, 28 October 1931.

[279] "El Partido Demócrata Nacional declaró oportunas y necesarias las reformas a la constitución," *La Razón*, 1 August 1931; "Aprobó, en parte, su plataforma electoral el Partido Demócrata Nacional," *La Argentina*, 2 August 1931; "En las elecciones internas del Partido Demócrata Progresista podran votar las mujeres," *La Razón*, 6 August 1931; "Hoy se proclamara la formula presidencial de la Unión Cívica Radical," *La Argentina*, 28 September 1931; "Se ha constituido un comité que abogará por la importancia del voto femenino," *La Razón*, 17 August 1932; "Julieta Lanteri: La mujer política," *Crítica*, 13 April 1931, p.1. Lanteri did not run in the election, but expressed great pleasure at the new pro-suffrage stance of the parties.

The inauguration of the Justo regime seemed to promise a new beginning for Argentina. Newspapers expressed the relief that came after the repressive Uriburu regime and the expectation that everything would return to normal in short order. Women came out to support the new president, and their presence suggested that Justo's administration would give their political rights favorable consideration. Shortly after Congress resumed its meetings in May of 1932, both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies would test that receptivity. Mario Bravo and José Bustillo both re-submitted their projects to their respective Houses, which entered the record with minimal comment. Three additional projects came before the deputies. First, socialist Silvio Ruggieri submitted a proposal that echoed that of Senator Bravo. Ruggieri made a brief statement pointing out that Spain had recently given "civic rights" to women. He also reiterated his party's traditional support of women's rights and noted that "various parties represented here, in their electoral programs, [announced] their intention to concede political rights to women." A group of conservative deputies then took its turn, providing a project that, in its fundamentals, did not differ from the socialist project- women would have voting rights equal to men without the obligation of military service. However, their arguments did differ from the socialists in their emphasis on nationalism. "Women are an integral part of popular sovereignty," argued the project's principal author Fernando de Andreis, "they are a part of the Argentine people, but by masculine law they do not have the right to elect their representatives or be elected in order to represent national sovereignty." The final project reproduced the Araya project of 1919, which set the female voting age at 22.[280] This flood of legislation demanded serious attention both in Congress and by the public.

[280] "Ya hay presidente legal," *Crítica*, 20 February 1932; "La mujer argentina," *Crítica*, 20 February 1932; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 1 p. 286; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 2 p. 202-9; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 87-98.

The pro-suffrage feminist groups of the nation, including some new and unexpected organizations, made sure to remind Congress of their interest in the new and revived proposals. Both the Pro-Women's Rights Association, still led by the Radical Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, and the Socialist Women's Center addressed letters to Congress reiterating their support and arguments for suffrage. A number of smaller groups added their voices to these traditional bulwarks of pro-suffrage feminism. However, women's voting rights now found support from Conservative feminists as well, a group that had resisted, or at least ignored, this issue until then. Most surprisingly, the National Council of Women submitted a letter "soliciting the prompt sanction of a women's suffrage law." The Council argued that the moment had at last arrived to "elevate [argentine] women to the same level as those of other civilized nations" in terms of legal and political rights. However, the most energetic Conservative endorsement of suffrage came from a new entity, the Argentine Suffrage Association. Founded in 1930, the Suffrage Association grew rapidly. According to its founder, Carmela Horne de Burmeister, its membership peaked at 80,000 nationwide in the mid 30s. Like all of the most important women's organizations, the Suffrage Association also enjoyed important political connections, in this case to Deputy Bustillo, and to important leaders within the Catholic Church. The Association made an impressive display of the influence they enjoyed when, shortly after the suffrage proposals appeared in Congress, one of their members addressed the nation over the radio. Even those expressing doubt about the reform did so in mild terms. One newspaper argued that "women will do no more than augment the errors" committed by male voters, thought the author admitted that this was

insufficient cause to block suffrage.[281] There could be no doubt that pro-suffrage sentiment in Argentina had reached an all-time high.

Despite the strong push for immediate passage of a suffrage law, the divergence of proposals necessitated a careful analysis of the different positions. Less than a week after the last of the proposals came in, Congress formed a joint committee to review the different projects and come to a consensus on a suffrage law. As the committee deliberated, the Suffrage Association and other feminist groups periodically wrote Congress in order to encourage their efforts and to make sure that the project did not disappear. Finally, after four months of deliberation, the committee, which included Senator Bravo, returned a draft proposal to the Chamber of Deputies for its consideration. The project had its basis in the Bravo/Ruggieri project- all women aged 18 and above had the exact same electoral rights as men without any military obligations. The project also included specific instructions for the enrollment of the new voters and the procedures for verifying their participation.[282] In September of 1932, for the first time in the nation's history, a suffrage law had made it through committee and stood ready for debate before the Chamber of Deputies.

The two-day debates in the Chamber of Deputies proved just how well the major arguments of the feminists had penetrated Argentine political discourse. Nearly all of the deputies who spoke did so in support of the project, and in the

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[281] "Pidieron el voto a la muer," *El Diario*, 4 May 1932; "El Senado celebró su primera sesión ordinaria," *La Vanguardia*, 4 May 1932; "Conferencias por L.S.5 pro sufragio femenino," *El Diario*, 14 May, 1932; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 2 p. 49,87-9, 128-9, 296, 404 & 823; Marysa Navarro, *Evita* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1981), 173; "El voto a la mujer," *El Diario*, 18 May 1932; Marifran Carlson, *¡Feminismo! The Woman's Movement in Argentina From Its Beginnings to Eva Perón* (Chicago: Academy Chicago 1988), 173-4.

[282] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, p. 1797-8; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 3 p. 384, 813-4; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 5 p. 62-4, 118-20; Cocca, *Ley de Sufragio Femenino*, 98-105.

end the bill passed the Deputies with a comfortable majority. All of the major points that feminists had made over the years reappeared for consideration, and the deputies found them meritorious. Once again, these included acclamations of women's moral qualities and assurances that they were every bit as ready as men to vote well. In terms of literacy requirements and age restrictions, the committee, which had included members who had favored such limitations, found that no need existed for unequal access to the polls. "The vote of an illiterate is always much more valuable in terms of moral strength," declared one committee member, "than that of a venal university-educated individual motivated by his or her own good instead of that of society." Others reiterated the historical or philosophical basis for women's rights, going back as far as ancient Greece. Still others asserted that the promises of equality enshrined in the Constitution would remain unfulfilled until the law gave women the vote. No one objected to these arguments, but there were criticisms of the project. These critics did not refute the project out of antipathy as such, but out of opposition to the obligatory nature of the vote. These opponents agreed that women had the faculties for the vote, but that making the vote mandatory would do no good and might even do women harm. They simply debated whether or not voting itself constituted a duty or a right (or possibly both). Others wished to introduce the vote gradually, as had occurred in other countries. In the end, these objections led the deputies to accept an amendment limiting women's suffrage to those who could read and write with the understanding that full suffrage would come later on. At the end of the second day of debates the amended project passed and the Chamber immediately sent it on to the Senate for its sanction.[283] The feminists congratulated the Deputies for their swift action, but did not cease their activity, urging concerned citizens to demonstrate in favor of the law.

[283] Cocca, *La ley de sufragio femenino*, 105-22.

The Senate, approaching the end of its regular session, proved surprisingly reluctant to tackle the issue. While outright opposition to women's suffrage did not appear, the senators seemed willing to stall women's rights as had so often happened before. The project's opponents based their strategy on financial concerns. To inscribe the entire female population on the voter rolls, they argued, would be a considerable undertaking, and surely would be expensive. Therefore, they moved the project to the budgetary committee in order to study those costs. There the project lingered, over the objections of the senators most concerned with its success. Deputy Ruggieri noted that "Congress approves enormous sums, not always justified, for works and projects of every kind" without hesitation, and the sudden concern for expenses could only be a bluff. Senators Palacios and Bravo raised similar objections. This turn of events prompted dismay from some outside observers and outrage in others. The editors of *La Nación* seemed mystified by the delay and observed that it would only take the "good will" of the senators to make it a reality. In contrast, *La Vanguardia*, already disillusioned with the government, expressed anger that the Senate had "defrauded women once again of their dearest hopes" but also referred to the action as "predictable" given the nature of those in power.[284] Naturally, the feminist groups did not take the delay well either. However, the derailing of the suffrage law of 1932 marked a watershed for these groups. While the Suffrage Association continued to operate and build its membership over the decade, the older pro-suffrage groups lost momentum or disappeared entirely.

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[284] "Empezó la Cámara tratar la ley de voto femenino," *La Nación*, 16 September 1932; "En defensa del sufragio," *La Vanguardia*, 18 September 1932; "En favor del voto femenino," *La Nación*, 19 September 1932; "El voto de la mujer," *La Nación*, 20 September 1932; "Duplicidad triunfante," *La Vanguardia*, 22 September 1932; "Tuvo vastas proporciones el mitin a favor del sufragio femenino que se realizó en la plaza del congreso," *El Mundo*, 25 September 1932; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 2 p. 124, 297-300, 326, 405, 497-9; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones, 1932*, v. 6, p. 38 and 86; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones, 1935*, v. 1, p. 145; "Voto femenino," *La Vanguardia* (supplement), 12 November 1946.

Feminism faced a prolonged period of ennui that forced women activists to re-evaluate their arguments and their strategy. Towards the end of the decade, this re-evaluation led to a new effort to unify and orchestrate the women's movement. However, in the mid 1940's events beyond the control of the feminists would once again override their efforts, facilitating the unity of the women's movement through Peronism.

Women's Groups during the Infamous Decade

The obstruction of the suffrage law in 1932 in many ways characterized the political climate of the Infamous Decade in Argentina. Accusations of corruption and fixed elections pervaded the era, and cynicism towards the political process filled the press. In such an atmosphere, the old argument that women would bring a moral quality to politics faced considerable scrutiny. On one hand, suffragist feminists maintained that in such a poisoned political climate, the need for women voters had never been greater. Opponents, on the other hand, expressed concern that not only would women be unable to fix politics, but that by entering the political realm they would become "tainted" by that same environment. While not new, these debates helped maintain interest in suffrage and feminism in an era that seemed hostile to women's rights. At the worst, opponents of feminism even discussed reversing one of the women's movement's greatest victories- Civil Code reform. Under these circumstances, women's rights organizations had to reassess their arguments and approach to achieving their goals. Losses within the movement both prompted and facilitated these changes, which saw fresh attempts to break down ideological barriers between feminists.

One of the first blows to old-guard feminism came unexpectedly early in 1932 when Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw died in a traffic accident. Her death

brought to an end one of the most colorful careers in Argentine politics and in feminism, as well as a distinct voice within the women's movement. Her goal had been to create a distinct women's movement that interacted with, but did not belong to, any existing political organization. While her "overly personal" style disconcerted some, she had certainly contributed energy and publicity to the women's movement. Her loss also meant that there was one less voice to challenge the obstruction of the suffrage law later that year, making it easier to ignore the clamor for voting rights. Many other feminists also vanished from the scene- Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto had died in 1928, and Cecilia Grierson passed away in 1934. Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, while still head of the Pro-Women's Rights Association, shifted her focus to education and, after 1936, gathering support and relief supplies for Republican Spain during that nation's Civil War. However, declining health limited her activity and by the end of the decade she had retired from public life. Of the most prominent feminists, only socialist Alicia Moreau de Justo, now a widow, remained an active participant in the feminist and suffragist movements.[285]

Despite the loss of these older feminists, new groups appeared to make the case for suffrage. The Argentine Suffrage Association, which truly made its presence known during the 1932 debates, became a fixture of the feminist movement during the 1930's. In its statement of purpose, the Association declared its faith in suffrage as a tool to promote "the progress and wellbeing of the country, the happiness of the family and the State, a harmonious life, the constructive arts, and the consolidation of a true modern democracy." These

[285] "Falleció hoy la Dra. Lanteri," *El Diario*, 25 February 1932; "Con Julieta Lanteri, desaparece un gran espíritu femenino," *Crítica*, 25 February 1932; Adelia di Carlo, "Doctora Julieta Lanteri: la gran líder del feminismo argentino ha muerto," *Caras y Ccaretas*, no. 1744, 5 March 1932; Araceli Bellota, *Julieta Lanteri: La pasiónn de una mujer* (Buenos Aires: Planeta Singular, 2001), 218-32; Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto, and Diego L. Aruindeguy, *Mujeres de la Política Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001), 260, 272-4, 287-9, 325-36; Alfredo G. Kohn Loncaria, *Cecilia Grierson: vida y obra de la primera medica argentina* (Buenos Aires: Stilografa, 1976), 21-2.

sentiments did not differ from those of previous suffrage groups, nor did their desire to create a union of "good heart and intelligence." However, despite their political connections to conservative politicians they did not enunciate a specific political agenda other than to win the vote and "orient and illuminate women" so that they would support laws to "benefit the moral, intellectual, social, and economic conditions of women, children, and adults." The Suffrage Association clearly sought to take on the mantle that the National Council of Women had once claimed as the premier women's organization. Indeed, the leaders of the Council expected to "assume the responsibility of educating Argentine women in the importance of the vote" once they had it.[286] However, the other organizations and affiliations had by no means disappeared.

Throughout the 1930's, the party-affiliated groups continued to function in support of their particular ideologies and agendas. This included support activities during elections and rallies, though the increasing cynicism of the era towards elections minimized this aspect of their roles. The Socialist feminists proved especially active during the 1930's. The Socialists proudly proclaimed their support of suffrage, and their members in Congress continued to push for the revival of the 1932 suffrage project. Socialist feminists also continued to make regular use of the press. *La Vanguardia* regularly included articles on the subject of feminism, and a new journal, *Vida Femenina*, provided a forum for Socialist feminists, male and female, to air their views on the full range of political subjects.[287]

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[286] *Asociación Argentina del Sufragio Femenino* (Buenos Aires: n.p, 1932), 2-7; "Pro-voto femenino," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, May-june 1933, p. 4.

[287] "Educación política de la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 16 September 1932; "Agrupaciones femeninas socialistas," *La Vanguardia*, 17 May 1935; "Vida Femenina," *La Vanguardia*, 20 January 1938; Nicolas Cuello, "El feminismo: su alcance," *La Vanguardia*, 1 May 1938; Manuel Palacios, "Los derechos políticos de la mujer," *Vida Femenina*, 8: 77, March 1940, p. 26-7.

Alicia Moreau de Justo, arguably the pre-eminent feminist leader of the day and a member of the Socialist Party's executive committee, spearheaded Socialist women's organizations and publications in order to advance both her Party and the women's movement. Her 1933 book, *El Socialismo y la mujer*, presents the most comprehensive vision of left-wing feminism available, discussing both her goals for and expected roles of women in Argentina. Socialism "signifies not only a modification of laws and budgets," Moreau wrote, "but also a change of institutions, customs, ideas, and feelings." This transformation "cannot be made without woman," she continued, "who is the mother, the first educator, the one that forms man's fundamental feelings and answers the first questions that the spectacle of the world poses to his developing intelligence." Yet Moreau called on women to

> Unite their forces as workers in the home, the factory, the workplace, the field, and the city to *conquer their political rights*, to fight with greater intelligence and greater strength for the birth of a world completely free of error and violence, a world based on the rights that make all human beings equal.

Moreau perpetuated the ideas that had guided her and her fellow feminists for years. Women could and should be equal to men, but their maternal role would always represent their chief value to society; women could help transform society, but their role within any society would not necessarily change from the domestic sphere. These ideas guided the Socialists in the 1930's as they tried to revive their political fortunes during the Infamous Decade with the help of women's organizations.[288]

Feminists also remained active in educational and social aid activities, the latter being especially critical during the economic crisis of the 1930's. The Beneficent Society and other member organizations of the National Council of

[288] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *El socialismo y la mujer* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1933), 9, 21-7; Deleis et. al, *Mujeres de la política argentina,* 325-6.

Women continued to operate much as it had since its inception, prompting praise from conservatives and criticism from leftist feminists. Socialist feminists believed that while the Society and other charities that "women of the upper bourgeois" operated did demonstrate women's "capabilities and even their self-denial", these organizations ultimately did more harm than good by "closing off all ideas of social renovation." Socialists associated opposition to social renovation with the Catholic Church, arguing that charity served as a method of proselytizing. Nevertheless, the Socialists and other politically based women's groups continued to rely on methods very similar to these religious charities in order to promote their own point of view, such as adult education classes and soup kitchens. One such group that appeared in 1932, during the debates over suffrage, was the Asociación Damas Argentinas *'Patria y Hogar'* (Argentine Ladies Association 'Fatherland and Home'). This association, which followed "the ideals of patriotism and disinterest inspired by Gen. Uriburu" made "fighting communism and all dissolute ideas" their primary purpose, yet claimed that their activities were "apolitical." Their activities included public festivals, provision of food and free classes on customary female workplace skills such as shorthand, accounting, weaving, and cooking. The 'Patria y Hogar' associations often sold the products of these classes at their public festivals to help fund their activities- a practice that many women's groups and other organizations had used for years. The appearance of the Patria y Hogar Association demonstrated that women's groups did indeed include the full range of political beliefs- from far left to far right- and that these groups made use of very similar methods to advance their agendas.[289]

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[289] "En la Sociedad de Beneficencia," *La Nación*, 15 September 1929; Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 168; Rodolfo Rivarola, "Influencia de la legislación actual en la inmoralidad y el delito desde la edad infantíl y bases para la reforma," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de la Mujer,* September 1932, p. 12; "Informe de la comité de la ayuda social del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* March 1933, p. 33; Blanca A. Cassagne Serres, "Delincuencia de menores," *Vida Femenina*, 3:31,

Women's groups also became more interested in foreign affairs. First during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) then during World War II many feminist organizations sponsored relief efforts for women and families in the affected nations. Particularly during the Spanish Civil War, this support usually reflected the ideology of those participating in the relief efforts- leftist feminists sent their aid to the Spanish Republic while those on the right preferred the nationalists under Gen. Franco. During World War II, women's groups tended to favor the Allies, although Argentina did not officially enter the war until 1945. Groups such as the *Junta de la Victoria* sponsored sewing contests, giving prizes to the women who produced the most clothing for "the soldiers of the armies of liberty." Relief groups also held lectures in which they explained the causes of the war and exhorting the women of the nation to work for victory. However, such aid to the allies did not meet with universal public approval. One right-wing women's group accused the *Junta de la Victoria* of being "yoked to Russia" and denounced the practice of sending aid to a "country that foments the destruction of society and family."[290] Wartime relief efforts, regardless of ideological orientation, represent one of the few cases in which women's groups sought to influence foreign affairs as such, though they had often observed events in other nations in order to draw inspiration for their own organizations. Feminists continued to interact with their colleagues abroad, and the new surge of women's suffrage laws that followed the Second World War helped form the basis for similar legislation in Argentina.

February 1936, p. 5; "Labor desarrollada por la Asociación D.A. 'Patria y Hogar,'" *Crisol*, 20 August 1933; "Agrupación A.N.D.E.S.," *Crisol*, 6 July 1934; "Asoc. Damas Argentinas 'Patria y Hogar,'" *Crisol*, 1 August 1934; "Labor cultural de la Agrupación Femenina 1 de Mayo, de La Plata," *La Vanguardia*, 8 December 1936.

[290] "La Junta de la Victoria entegó ayer premios a sus tejidores más diligentes," *La Nación*, 13 December 1941; "Es magnífica la labor que viene cumpliendo la sección femenina de la Unión Nacionalista Santafesina," *Crisol*, 16 December 1941.

International conferences also retained importance for feminists, particularly as more Latin American nations- Brazil and Uruguay in 1932 and Cuba in 1934- granted women the vote. The idea of international cooperation appealed to the new feminist leaders. Victoria Ocampo, a renowned author and political activist, argued that "the fortunes of women in China or Germany, in Russia or the United States, in short, in any corner of the world, is a matter of the utmost seriousness for us because we feel the repercussions." International conference meeting during the 1930's continued to pass resolutions supporting women's rights, and by the end of the decade women delegates started to find their way into the major conferences. As a result of this increased female presence, the Eighth International American Conference, held in 1938, passed a resolution declaring that women had a right to "equal political treatment as men" and urging the nations in the conference to pass legislation to that effect. However, Argentina abstained from voting on the resolution, thus declining to adopt its principles. One of the Argentine delegates assured the assembly that this decision did not represent "a rejection of the recognition of the great merits of the arguments in favor of conceding rights to women." Instead, the Argentine delegation believed that "legislation on the civil and political rights of women depend on local circumstances" and therefore had no place in an international conference. Feminists did not accept this argument, and one female delegate asserted that "there is no legal rationale strong enough to impede this assembly from doing justice to the women of the Americas."[291] On both the national and

[291] Victoria Ocampo, *La mujer y su expresión*, 27-8; *Informe sobre the septima conferencia internacional americana de Montevideo* (Buenos Aires: Gil S,A., 1933), 18; Vehils, *Los principios…*, 48-9; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 133; *Octava conferencia internacional americana: Lima, Peru 9 de diciembre de 1938* (Washington, DC: Unión Panamericana, 1938), 111-2; *La República Argentina en la octava conferencia internacional americana reunida en Lima de 19 a 27 de diciembre de 1938* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relacionnes Exteriores y Culto, 1939), 252-60; Inter-American Commission of Women, *Report of the Inter-American Commission of Women to the Eighth International Conference of American States on the Political and Civil Rights of Women* (Washington: Pan American Union, 1938), 16-26.

international stage, feminists found it hard to advance the issue of political rights. Political leaders paid lip service to the benefits of women's suffrage and political participation but refused to advance the necessary legislation to facilitate it.

Throughout the 1930's, suffragists attempted to revive the support for suffrage that had so nearly led to success in 1932. As early as 1933, members of the Senate called for a vote on suffrage, reminding that assembly that the major parties and President Justo himself had promised to support the issue-though he did nothing to follow through on that promise once elected. In 1934, the Argentine Suffrage Association renewed its petition in favor of suffrage, asserting that "almost every entity that works for the social, political, and economic betterment of women and the Argentine family" supported the reform. A member of the Senate budget committee responded to both these demands with assurances that the committee would not hesitate to expedite the matter, but the study of the costs involved would have to continue. However, the 1932 suffrage project did not return to the Senate floor in a timely manner. As Senators Bravo and Palacios and Deputy Ruggieri, the principal authors of the 1932 suffrage project, reintroduced their women's suffrage proposal in 1935. The projects granted women the same political rights as men without military obligations. However, neither of these projects came to a vote. Their failure reflected a growing uncertainty about the future of feminism and democracy. Adolfo Dickmann expressed this doubt in an article for *Vida Femenina*:

> Are there not enough difficulties facing democracy in the world for us to add to them voluntarily and deliberately? Would it not be more prudent and logical to concentrate all our efforts towards maintaining and conserving the popular rights so gravely threatened in most countries by dictatorships? Is it worth the trouble democracy and liberty to a backwards, if transitory, government in order to authorize women's suffrage for purely doctrinaire reasons?

Dickmann observed that many feminists fell victim to these doubts, though he personally believed that the struggle for women's voting rights still needed to continue.[292] However, a struggle over maintaining rights already won did indeed provide the motivation for one of the most dramatic feminist mobilizations of the decade.

In 1935, the Justo administration attempted to reverse the reform of the Civil Code (law 11357) that the feminists had helped create in 1926. The proposed reform declared that "the wife…shall keep house, carrying on the domestic work" as the family's circumstances dictated. The reform only permitted a wife to work with the approval of her husband, though she could obtain a court permit to work "provided the needs of the home require it." The proposal also would have returned power over family finances to husbands. Wives could control their own earnings and personal goods, but "the husband can at any time require information about the wife's management." Husbands could even "ask a court to deprive her of [that] management," under the proposed reform "if she is improvident or extravagant." Wives would not have enjoyed the same right, even though both spouses would be responsible for any debts that one of them incurred. The government did its best to avoid drawing attention to the change, burying it in an article of an omnibus bill. However, a group of feminists did notice the article in question, and under the leadership of Victoria Ocampo formed a new group, the Unión de Mujeres Argentinas (Argentine Women's Union), to oppose the destruction of their civil rights. Ocampo and her cohorts understood, as all feminists had since 1900, that only an appeal to all classes of women could make their efforts successful, though once again this

[292] Congreso Nacional, Cámara del Senado, *Diario de Sesiones de 1933*, v.1 p. 774; Congreso Nacional, Cámara del Senado, *Diario de Sesiones de 1934*, v. 1 p. 776-7; Congreso Nacional, Cámara del Senado, *Diario de Sesiones de 1935*, v.1, p. 144; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1935*, v. 3 p. 130; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 130-4; Adolfo Dickmann, "¿Es oportuno la campaña por el sufragio femenino?" *Vida Femenina*, 2:21, April 1935, p. 16.

appeal failed to attract a large popular following. Ocampo, by then a successful publisher and author, drew considerable attention to the campaign and provoked a public outcry against the reversal of law 11357. Like so many feminists before and since, Ocampo and the Unión garnered both praise and scorn, but in the end they did succeed in blocking the hidden attack on women's rights. The Union continued to operate for several more years, contributing to debates over suffrage and other women's rights issues.[293]

Ocampo represented the latest effort to bring together a true, non-partisan, women's rights coalition. She herself came from a background similar to that of the leaders of the National Council of Women- wealthy, privileged, and with good social and political connections. Ocampo urged women to work together because "we cannot wait for help from men. They cannot comprehend the need we have to claim rights that they themselves do not miss." However, she reached out to both conservatives and leftists, a move that proved controversial. "I do not speak on behalf of any political group," she wrote, "not even the Communists, as some people have tried to assert, perhaps because I never treated communists as untouchables…" Ocampo believed that all women could and should pursue interests both in and out of the home. She used the French scientist Marie Curie as her example, informing her readers that "it was during the period when she was boiling milk bottles for her babies that she also

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[293] Inter-American Commission of Women, *Report of the Inter-American Commission of Women…*, p. 98-100 (The Argentine delegate to the commission, Ana Rosa Schlieper de Martínez Guerrero, was also vice-president of the Argentine Women's Union); Doris Meyer, *Against the Wind and the Tide: Victoria Ocampo* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 135-40; Nancy Caro Hollander, "Women Workers and the Class Struggle: The Case of Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives*, 4:1-2, Winter/Spring 1977, p. 6-7; Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 282-3; Fernando Gil Lozano, Valeria Silvina Pita, and María Gabriela Ini, eds., *Historia de las mujeres en la Argentina, siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2000), 214; Deleis et. al, *Mujeres de la política argentina*, 325 and 391-2; Carlos Abeijon and Jorge Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina antes y después de Eva Perrón* (Buenos Aires: Cuarto Mundo, 1975), 75-6; Carlson, *¡Feminismo!…*, 177-9; María Rosa Oliver, *La vida cotidiana* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1969), 348-54.

began to work diligently" alongside her husband. Ocampo herself did not start a family of her own, focusing her efforts on her literary magazine *Sur* and the work of the Argentine Women's Union. The latter distributed information on subjects ranging from workplace protection laws and the prohibition of prostitution to tips on childcare. The Union also distributed pamphlets of Ocampo's essays and radio addresses, a practice that led to confrontations with hostile authorities. Ocampo resigned as president of the Union in 1938, but the organization continued to function for several years without her.[294]

While Ocampo provided a new voice for feminism in Argentina, those opposed to suffrage and women's rights also became increasingly vocal in the late 1930's. Opposition to feminism, muted during the late 20's and early 30's, found a new forum in the newspapers of the far right. Papers such as *Crisol* and *Bandera Argentina* both took on extremely conservative views and expressed support for fascism (particularly that of Italy's Benito Mussolini). "The very idea of seeing the fair sex mixed up in the ugly exertions of a political committee," opined one *Bandera Argentina* editorial, "seems comical to us." Other writers proved less sanguine. For commentator Juan Magaldi, "Man- and the Creator wanted it thus- has always been the head of the family and charged with its sustenance." To grant women any political power threatened this state of affairs, threatening social chaos if not divine retribution. Magaldi even went so far as to connect feminist movements worldwide to "the plans for disorganization [and] the destruction of morally sound principles dictated by Moscow," though he did not accuse all feminists of being communists. Fear of moral decay permeated the articles printed in the right wing press, which urged women to "reject feminism as an enemy of femininity" and respect the "natural" limits of the home. These

[294] Meyer, *Against the Wind…*, 137-8; Ocampo, *La mujer y su expresión*, 64-66; Sosa de Newton, *Diccionario Bibliográfico*, 448-9; *Sur,* v. 9, November 1939, p. 3.

archconservatives made the case for a return to an idealized past in which men took care of all the public business related to the family.[295]

The right-wing vision of the father as the sole public representative of the family had its expression in a new attempt at a suffrage law in 1938. Senator Juan Cafferata, a member of the majority National Democratic Party, proposed that "fathers of families will in addition to their own vote, have an additional vote for their Argentine spouse and for every child" that met the voting requirements and did not live independently. Cafferata justified this unusual notion as a compromise between the "justice of recognizing the civic rights of all individuals regardless of sex or status" and the rights of the "head of the family, charged by nature and by the law to represent, defend, and provide for" their families. While ignoring female-headed households, Cafferata did at least provide a creative alternative to true women's suffrage. However, the complications his proposed law led his fellow senators to reject the proposal. Later that year deputy Santiago Fassi put forth a suffrage project with another relative novelty- military service. Women would be allowed to vote on the same basis as men, but would also be obliged to provide "auxiliary service compatible with their sex" in the armed forces. The growing conflict in Europe at the time evidently weighed on Fassi's mind when he included this provision in his bill. However, he insisted that when "exercising sovereignty" women should "not fail to remember their duty, should that time arrive for our homeland." The project, like so many of its predecessors, languished in committee. Together, the Cafferata and Fassi projects reflect a new appraisal of women's suffrage that accommodated changing circumstances both locally and globally. A surge of strong right-wing activism created an

[295] "La insania del voto a la mujer," *Bandera Argentina*, 7 July 1938; Juan B. Magaldi, "¿Corresponde a la mujer un puesto en las contiendas políticas y en el parlamento?" *Bandera Argentina*, 9 July 1938; Candido Mirón, "Desfiles femeninas," *Bandera Argentina*, 29 July 1938; David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationnalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (Berekly: University of California Press, 1993), 99 and 107-8.

atmosphere of overt hostility to feminism, in contrast to the subtler resistance that had allowed the 1932 suffrage project to stagnate in the Senate budget committee. While conservatives proved unable to reverse the gains feminism had made so far in national legislation, these "enemies of liberty", as Alicia Moreau de Justo dubbed them, could obstruct new advances or put their own face on the goals of feminism.[296] However, both feminists and conservatives would face new challenges in the following decade as the political climate changed once again.

Feminism in the 1940s

During the "Infamous Decade" of the 1930s, feminism and democracy in Argentina faced considerable challenges. While the women's rights movement had weathered attempts to reverse advances in female civil rights, the growth of archconservative groups, many with fascist sympathies, put the future of feminism in doubt. As the new decade dawned and war erupted across the globe, that future remained uncertain as the government vacillated over the course it would take. Finally, in 1943 a new military coup would replace the elected regime with a dictatorship, temporarily rendering the question moot. However, the new government included a leader that would eventually make the goal of women's suffrage a reality.

The governments at the start of the 1940's differed little from those of the previous decade. Electoral fraud still plagued the system, and conservative policies prevailed. Nevertheless, feminists once again attempted to advance women's suffrage, and friendly legislators in Congress offered up projects that

[296] Congreso Nacional, Cámara del Senado, *Diario de Sesiones de 1938*, v. 1, p. 1364-6; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1938*, v. 2, p. 1484-6; Coca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 139-44; Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia*, 82-3.

echoed the attempts of previous years. In 1939, Radical Deputy Bernardino Horne presented a bill for full suffrage without military obligations. Horne expressly admitted that his project "does nothing but reproduce the ideas sustained in the cited precedents" and expressed surprise that such a reform still needed debate. Horne received accolades from the Argentine Suffrage Association for his work, but the project itself did not make any progress in the Chamber of Deputies. In 1940, Deputies Santiago Fassi and Silvio Ruggieri re-submitted their projects for consideration. The Argentine Women's Suffrage Association endorsed these projects as well, as did the women's committee of the Radical Party. Though Ruggieri made a fresh attempt with his project in 1942, by now the administration had made its stance on suffrage clear to all- they would take no action.[297] While this state of affairs persisted, feminists could not expect their agenda to succeed.

By now, the frustration of the feminists was considerable, yet a new possibility did emerge unexpectedly in 1943. That year, a group of officers known as the GOU staged a successful coup, leading to a two-year military regime. While this government did include some strongly conservative elements that sought to reverse the Civil Code reform, it also included officers who seemed sympathetic towards the idea of women's suffrage. As this government made preparations to restore civilian rule, it even discussed the possibility of granting women the vote in the new elections. However, most commentators agreed that it would not be appropriate for a non-elected government to grant voting rights, and so the administration abandoned the idea. Nevertheless, the positive light shed on the subject helped set the tone for the final debates and approval for

[297] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1939*, v. 1, p. 424; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1939*, v. 3, p. 713-4; Cocca, *Ley de sufragio femenino*, 145-50; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de1940*, v. 1, p. 130 200, and 616; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1940*, v. 2, p. 517; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1940*, v. 4, p. 892; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1942*, v. 2, p. 512-3.

women's suffrage. Furthermore, the onset of war created the circumstances for a fresh surge of suffrage legislation internationally. During and after World War II, six more Latin American nations enacted women's suffrage legislation. This move towards suffrage reflected a renewed international consensus that women's rights were both desirable and necessary.[298] For the nations of Latin America, including Argentina, this consensus formed part of the "Chapultepec Treaty" of 1945, the basis for post-War collaboration among the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

The Chapultepec (Mexico) Conference of March 1945, which took place at the time Argentina finally took the side of the Allies in World War II, completed the trend of earlier inter-American conferences towards a full endorsement of women's rights. The conference passed a resolution listing all of the American nations that had endorsed suffrage at any level (including San Juan province) and declared suffrage to be a matter of "the most elemental human justice." The resolution emphasized the importance of women's maternal role and their economic and intellectual contributions to society, but also emphasized more recent contributions:

> The participation of women in the American Republics and other parts of the world during the war, as members of the armed forces and as medics and nurses, and in other technical and professional labors, and as producers in industry, agriculture, and commerce, working sided by side with men in all aspects of the war effort and in the maintenance of the civil economy, has proved, without a shadow of doubt, their ability to face up to all the duties of citizenship, as well as those of professional and vocational life.

Women, in short, had earned the right to vote through their labors both before and during the war. Argentina's approval of this resolution helped feminists

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[298] Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia*, 204; "Defender la democracia, partidos, y sufragio," *La Vanguardia*, 16 January 1938; Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 350-1; "Inoportunidad de una reforma," *La Nación*, 28 July 1945.

justify the approval of the final suffrage law as a fulfillment of diplomatic commitments.[299] While doubts might remain within Argentina about the wisdom of women's suffrage, the government was at least willing to support the idea in theory- a move that it had declined to make when a similar resolution came up in the 1938 Inter-American Conference. Despite the government's apparent shift in policy towards suffrage, the feminists could not yet rest easy. They had no way of knowing who would win the scheduled elections, and past experience had proven that official support of women's rights did not necessarily translate into action. The new administration would prove to be both more and less than they desired as it embraced suffrage while rejecting the leadership of the feminists.

Conclusion

The years following the Civil Code Reform of 1926 saw some of the greatest highs and lows for the women's rights movement in Argentina. On the one hand, suffrage legislation passed in San Juan, national suffrage projects came closer to success than they ever had before, and a new generation of feminist leaders rose to continue the movement as the old generation faded. On the other hand, the coup of 1930 and the governments that followed placed the entire future of women's rights in doubt. Suffrage legislation bogged down in congressional committees, anti-feminist publications attacked the women's movements, and conservatives in power even sought to reverse the gains of the previous decade. Yet the women's movement survived these threats and emerged from the Infamous Decade revitalized. In the 1940's a change in government proved favorable to the feminists and revived the possibility of

[299] Argentina, Senado de la Nación, *Aprobación del acta de Chapultepec y cartas de las Naciones Unidas* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1946), 64-77; Lucila de Greorio Lavié, *La Ciudadania: para las mujeres que votan* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Argentina, 1948), 21-2.

enacting female voting rights at last. The feminists had made their case to the nation, and those in power now seemed ready to act on the arguments that feminists had made for decades. Yet the feminists themselves now proved reluctant to accept suffrage, arguing that a military junta could not legitimately enact a democratic reform. However, the willingness of conservative military officers to seriously consider the idea of women's voting rights proved that the hard work of the pro-suffrage groups had not been in vain.

Throughout the late 1920's, 30's, and early 40's, politicians demonstrated that they had heard and understood the arguments of feminists, though they did not always accept them. Again and again government figures and political commentators repeated the principal arguments of the feminists. They recognized the strong moral influence women could wield, particularly in the family. The accepted that women played an important role in the modern workforce, and that their work had demonstrated that they could handle responsibility beyond the home. Finally, the agreed that true democracy and political progress necessitated greater inclusiveness in the electorate. However, anti-feminists had counter-arguments for each of these points. Especially in the context of the 1930's, opponents of suffrage worried that women would lose their moral strength if allowed into the sordid world of modern politics. This would in turn lead to moral decay within the home and society. Conservatives objected to the presence of women in the workplace, again blaming female employment for social disintegration. Lastly, anti-feminists linked feminism to communism and other "disreputable" ideologies, renewing concerns that the "ill-prepared" female voters would support dangerous candidates. While mainstream politicians tended to avoid making such arguments themselves, the continual obstruction of suffrage legislation throughout the 1930's and early 1940's strongly suggests that the anti-feminists had won them over. Meanwhile, lack of strong public support

made it easier for politicians to disregard the demands that organized feminism made for voting rights.

In 1943, government policy on feminism appeared ready for another shift. The military regime that followed the coup of that year enacted policies favorable to women, such as decrees establishing better workplace conditions, and signed international treaties supporting suffrage in principle. However, until full democracy returned women's suffrage would remain a possibility, nothing more. During the next three years, a new political movement developed within Argentina that brought to power one of the most dynamic and controversial administrations in the nation's history. The presidency of Juan Perón would arise from a massive public following that energized politics and made a vast array of political and economic reforms possible. Perón and his wife, Evita, made a place for women in their movement, making their own women's organization a part of their core constituency. The Peróns would base their appeal to women on a combination of the arguments earlier feminists had made, the appropriation of the activities and organizational strategies women's groups had used, and the adoption of many feminist reforms in education, work regulations, and other social reforms. This powerful combination allowed some women to enjoy a tremendous, if brief, opportunity to participate in national politics.

Illustration 7- Women Vote in San Juan, 1928. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 8- Victoria Ocampo at the National Council of Women Library. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Chapter V
Feminists and Education

> If one speaks to [women] of rights, one must also speak to them of duties. Their education must reach the point that will power overcomes weakness.
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> -José P. Otero writing in *La mujer: encuesta feminísta Argentina*[300]

> If we educate our women… we will improve our present and future generations. We will better as far as possible, within the limits of science, the factors that prominently intervene in the formation of our daughters' characters, and we will have contributed to their purification of future customs and improvement of current ones.
>
> -Mercedes G. Humano Ortíz in *Emancipación de la mujer*[301]

As we have already seen, education played a critical role in the appearance and growth of feminism in Argentina. Nearly every major leader of the women's suffrage movement benefited from an advanced education and had entered the ranks of a distinguished profession. Many of these activists also became teachers themselves, either in regular schools or in adult education programs. This access to education played an important part in fomenting the suffragists' political awareness- both in the sense of expanding their horizons and opportunities as well as giving them first hand experiences of the obstacles women faced and just how much remained to be done. Through expanded educational opportunities for women- both children and adults- suffragists planned to break down some of the barriers that women faced, opening the way for the vote in the short term and for more sweeping reforms while providing

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[300] José P. Otero in *La mujer: encuesta feminista Argentina*, edited by Miguel J. Font (Buenos Aires: n.p, 1919), 100.

[301] Mercedes G. Humano Ortíz, *Emancipación de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta José Tragant, 1918), 107-8.

other women with the opportunities for economic and social advancement they enjoyed. Feminists sought to reform educational policy through their own lobbying efforts and through the vote. Education, therefore, played a critical role as both a means for and an objective of the Argentine feminist movement.

The roots of the belief that education would pave the way to political strength can be found in long standing ideas throughout the western world and within Argentina. Suffragist arguments for educational reform built on the advantages women supposedly already enjoyed. As guardians of the home, women would be the first teachers that any child had. In order to ensure a virtuous future generation, it followed that those most responsible for shaping that generation also be well educated. Such arguments had their origins in the move for greater educational opportunities for women in the United States and Britain. In her study of the origins of the ideal of the domestic sphere, Nancy Cott examines the importance of education in changing attitudes about and among women. Cott shows that education for women found justification "in the presumptive roles of man's companion, wife, mother, wielder not of public power but of private influence and morality."[302] Women's education was, therefore, designed to train all women, regardless of class, that their place was in the home. Cott argues that this approach had the unintended consequences of creating a female consciousness that superceded class, helping to pave the way for female political activism. Furthermore, the most prominent suffragists of the United States were well educated, suggesting that their learning encouraged their interest in the world beyond the home.[303] As we shall see, Argentine . In some ways, however, particularly in the continued class division among women, the Argentine case differs substantially.

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[302] Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New Engalnd, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 105.

[303] *Ibid.,* 125

Feminists sought to provide women the means to take on a larger role in feminism holds a striking resemblance to the changes depicted by Cott in a social and economic sense as well. Foremost in the minds of suffragists that championed education was the need to justify female education in the first place. They saw the lack of women in higher education and technical training as the result of the long-standing assumption that women were unsuited to such endeavors. As a consequence, women "until now have made rare, tentative attempts" at breaking into higher education, but these attempts "have discredited the prejudices that over the centuries have prevented women from experiencing the joys that solid instruction brings."[304] Feminists frequently referred to those women, such as Marie Curie, who had overcome societal obstacles to achieve greatness in various fields. As they saw it, what made these women exceptional was that they defied the expectations of men. These expectations circumscribed women, not any inherent female characteristics. "Society in its masculine wisdom," wrote María Lacerda de Maura, "or rather, men in their reasonableness *decree* the inferiority of women and, under the pretext that she is *purer*- freedom does not exclude purity- demand she be modest, that she be little seen, that she respect the public voice, that she be mindful of *what they might say*, in short: they bind her reason, they make here a social prisoner."[305] Little doubt existed that strict limits bound women, and there was equally little doubt that men had placed these limits.

While feminists might emphasize men's responsibility for the obstacles women faced, they did not expect men to change their ways on their own. On the contrary, feminists were equally mindful of the need for women to make

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[304] Matilde T. Flairoto, "La mujer y su influencia en los destinos humanos." *Unión y Labor*, January 1910, p. 6.

[305] María LaCerda de Maura*¿La mujer es una degenerada?* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Luz y Vida, 1925), 49.

changes of their own in society. As author Victoria Ocampo noted, the most urgent task was for women to become "what they ought to be in front of themselves," thus realizing their own potential. Only this way could there be a "magnificent union between two equal beings, that mutually enrich themselves."[306] All feminists subscribed to this broad vision. To achieve it, however, women had to overcome certain obstacles in their own character and attitude- from lack of use, some feminists argued, women had indeed experienced a decline in their mental faculties. Some women even seemed to enjoy their status, allowing men to perform the most difficult tasks in life and reaping the benefits.[307] For other women, lack of education seemed to lead to exploitation and vice. Only through "proper" instruction- the precise meaning of which might vary depending on the ideas of the feminist proposing them- could these women be saved from degradation and begin to improve their lives.[308] In both cases, feminists held a firm conviction that they knew both what was wrong with the education system in Argentina and how to rectify the situation. Their involvement was not unprecedented. By contributing to the dialogue over educational policy in the nation, they joined a long tradition of female participation in the nation's schools. By improving women's education, feminists built the argument in favor of suffrage as they proved that women were capable of voting responsibly.

Women within the Argentine Education System

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[306] Victoria. Ocampo, *La mujer y su expresión* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sur, 1936), 63.

[307] Herminia C. Brumana In *La mujer: Encuesta feminista argentina*, ed. Miguel J. Font (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1919), 182-3; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "La inferioridad de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1916, p. 20-1.

[308] "Notas de relación," *Unión y Labor*, March 1910, p. 21; Francisco P. Suneo, "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1918, p. 27.

In many respects, Argentina's experience with education mirrored that of the United States and the British Commonwealth in that advocates of female education could draw on the political history of their nation to advance their cause. Education preoccupied the minds of Argentina's founding fathers, particularly Domingo Sarmiento, president from 1868-74. In his essay on popular education, Sarmiento declared that "society has a vital interest in assuring that all the individuals that with time will form the nation have, through their childhood education, been sufficiently prepared to play the social roles to which they are called."[309] Later feminists echoed these statements, arguing that "it is this work of love and justice especially that is the responsibility of women, which she should initiate and guide to completion with all her energy and perseverance."[310] This drive to involve women in education had two aspects- to prepare the future voters for their new duties and, more importantly, to prepare women for a larger social role. The basis for these goals had their roots in the experiences of the 19th century, which saw Argentine women playing a vital role in the development of educational institutions.

To feminists, education in general and female learning in particular were signs of civilization. In this, they agreed with the early leaders of the nation. During the colonial era, the Church controlled education much as it had dominated any other social services. As we have seen, Bernardo Rivadavia, seeking to diminish religious influence in the nation, placed the administration of most of these services in the hands of the Sociedad de Beneficencia. Education,

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[309] Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Educación Popular* (Buenos Aires: Banca de la Provincia de Córdoba, 1989), 56-7. Sarmiento served as President from 1868-74.

[310] Ersilia Magno. "Pro-Infancia." *Unión y Labor,* October 1909, p. 7.

especially girl's education, formed part of the Sociedad's responsibilities.[311] With the growth of centralized state power in the latter half of the century, the Sociedad in turn lost control over education.[312] During his presidency, Domingo Sarmiento took on the leading role in this process. Sarmiento argued that true order came from a well-educated society, not from force. Since all of society needed to be educated for order to prevail, it followed that equal education for women was essential.[313] This was because the better-educated people would be more conscious of their civic duties. Education for women would therefore improve democracy as a whole as well as open new doors for women.

In clinging to this belief of the relationship between progress and women's education, both feminists and educators in Argentina looked to Europe and the United States as a model. Once again, Sarmiento set the precedent for this attitude. In his study of education, he highlighted a school near Boston, that in addition to the "ordinary" courses, taught women algebra, chemistry, anatomy and botany. He also reported favorably on French "asylum rooms" which put upper class women in contact with the lower classes, thus aiding the latter and opening the eyes of the former.[314] Years later, feminists continued to praise the seriousness and dedication of women in the English-speaking world. Writing after women in England and the United States had won the vote, María Lacerda de Maura credited their success to high standards of education. Latin American women, in contrast, seemed content with "cinemas, theater of little worth, [and]

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[311] Elia M. Martínez, "Instrucción Pública," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:7, September 1902, p. 23.

[312] Gustavo Parra *Antimodernidad y trabajo social: Origenes y expansión del trabajo social argentino* (Lujan: Universidad Nacional de Lujan, 1999), 108-9; Elia M. Martínez, "Instrucción primaria," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:7, September 1902, p. 25-6.

[313] Humano Ortíz, *Emancipación de la mujer,* 7-8; Sarmiento, *Educación popular*, 61-2.

[314] Sarmiento, *Educación popular* 144-5, 45.

witnessing erotic scenes."[315] Wishing to imitate the success of suffragists in other lands, Argentine feminists urged men and women alike to improve their minds. Only then could they "occupy the great posts that the future has reserved for them."[316]

Coupled with the drive to expand education was the effort to promote women as educators. Once again, calls for women to serve as teachers dated to the late nineteenth century. Sarmiento believed that women possessed "moral aptitude that makes them far superior to men as teachers of tender children." He likened their influence over children to that of mothers whose influence over children was of the heart more than the mind.[317] Later educators and feminists echoed this belief that women were inherently better teachers, at least for the youngest students. These arguments always emphasized the inherent qualities of women, thus reinforcing the notion that women were separate but equal to men. Writing in 1909, Ernesto Nelson argued that women's essential role in education was "that of *natural* intercessor between child and adult man, between the child and objective reality…the woman is the *natural* educator of man at the age where is psychic nature is realized."[318] Feminists sometimes gave these qualities a more human, as opposed to biologically determined, character. Mercedes Humano Ortíz, for example, pointed out that society, rather than nature, insists that mothers are primarily responsible for the awesome task of shaping future generations.[319]

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[315] Lacerda de Maura, *¿La mujer es una degenerada?* 65.

[316] "Cambió su papel en el mundo moderno: ahora debe actuar política y socialmente," *Democracia,* 1 March 1947.

[317] Sarmiento, *Educación popular* 140-1.

[318] Ernesto Nelson, "Una faz de la acción social de la mujer." *Unión y Labor,* October 1909, p. 15. My emphasis.

[319] Humano Ortíz, *Emancipación de la mujer,* 87-6.

During his presidency, Sarmiento combined this belief in the inherent qualifications of women as teachers with his faith in the superiority of U.S. and European educational systems. In order to create the sort of educators he desired, Sarmeinto invited a group of female American teachers to Argentina in order to train women as educators. These women, in turn, formed the foundation of both the public school system and the "normal schools" that served as teacher training centers. Sarmiento and the Americans continued to evoke praise from feminists years after their work was complete, and women continued to dominate the teaching profession.[320] However, the precedent of female involvement in the Argentine educational system did not necessarily translate into appointments to important educational administrative posts. Feminists readily decried this state of affairs. While acknowledging that "the intellectual activity, self-awareness and preparation of women" had never been greater, feminists pointed out that Argentina lagged behind other modern nations in allowing women to contribute to policy-making.[321] This argument implicitly included the idea that allowing women a greater role in government education systems would improve the quality of the instruction the nation's children received.

That education and especially female education required improvement did not seem to be in much doubt among the pundits of the day. The National Education Council, which held the responsibility for implementing Argentina's education codes, had a reputation for corruption that led the nations schools into "anarchy". Schools ignored laws requiring education to be free and mandatory,

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[320] "Discurso del Sr. José B. Zabiaur," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1915, p. 413; "La mujer en la Argentina: Costumbres, educación, profesiones a que se dedica, datos estadísticos, legislación, etc.," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, June 1902, p. 34; Elia M. Martínez, "Instrucción primaria," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:7, September 1902, p. 27.

[321] Elia M. Martínez, "Informe de la comisión de la prensa," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:19, Sept. 1905, p. 20-1.

effectively forcing parents to pay for essential school materials and promoting children's employment in industry. Moreover, critics asserted that schooling by no means reached all sectors of the nation, leaving rural children with almost no opportunities in life.[322] Feminists held out the argument that allowing women to affect education policy would help to rectify these grave problems. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, therefore, they advanced their case and cheered every woman who obtained the opportunity to influence education at a higher level as well as those male members of the education establishment they felt had done the most to promote women in education.[323] Through the press, professional conferences and direct involvement in policy-making, feminists contributed to the development of education in Argentina and established the basis for greater access for women to that education.[324] Their critiques of the educational system, however, emphasized reform rather than reconstruction. Feminists sought to improve the existing educational institutions, not rebuild them from scratch.

The Argentine government established the guidelines for education in the nation in 1884 with Law 1420, and feminists and other educational activists made many of their arguments with reference to this law. Its articles included guarantees that schooling would be free and obligatory and spelled out the subjects that all students had to learn. These subjects included history, reading

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[322] "La integración del consejo de educación," *La Prensa*, 8 May 1926; "Enseñanza gratuita, obligatoria y laica," *Mujeres Argentinas,* 15 March 1948, p. 1; "El trabajo de los niños," *El Diario,* 20 July 1922,; Tomás Amadeo, *La redención por la mujer* (Buenos Aires: Grafico Oceana, 1928), 7-8.

[323] "Al excelentisimo señor presidente de la nación Dr. Marcelo T. de Alvear," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 25:88-9, May 1925, p. 37; "Actividades femeninas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* January/February 1933, p. 29; Liliana Ferraro, "Una argentina y dos categorias de mujeres," *Érase una vez la mujer* (Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 1915), p. 49.

[324] For an example of women in education conferences, see "El congreso del niño," *La Nación*, 18 October 1924.

and writing, mathematics, science, civics, gymnastics, and moral education. However, moral education was made distinct from religious education, effectively distancing the Church from direct participation in the schools. In addition, girls would learn basic home economics, while boys received elementary military training. All of these measures were designed to "simultaneously favor and direct the moral, intellectual, and physical development of all children from six to fourteen years of age."[325] While Law 1420 established these guidelines, implementation could be vague or uneven. As we have already seen, the degree to which education truly was free and obligatory for all children formed the basis for considerable debate and criticism. The manner in which schools fulfilled the requirements for moral education also drew the attention of feminists, as we shall see later on. Of more direct concern for feminists, however, was the education girls and women received in the nation.

Feminists drew on their own experience as well as their observations of the state of the nation as the basis for their critique. As we saw in chapter two, the leaders of the feminist movement had to struggle against considerable opposition in order to obtain access to higher education. Furthermore, some feminists had contact with policymakers, and all could rely on other women to provide examples of the shortcomings of both formal and informal female education.[326] However, by far the most important contact that feminists had with the education system came from the widespread employment of women as teachers, particularly at the elementary school level. In the years between the census of 1895 and that of 1914, the number of women in "Instruction and

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[325] Augusto da Rocha, ed., *Colección completa de leyes nacionales* (Buenos Aires: La Facultad, 1918), p. 32-4. The law allowed children to receive religious instruction either before or after school, but no during class hours.

[326] For examples see Lily Sosa de Newton, *Diccionario biográfico de mujeres aregentinas* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1986); Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto, and Diego L. Arguideguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001).

education" rose from 7,207 to 43,640 (versus 11,151 to 39,544 for men). Women equaled or exceeded the number of men in almost every sub-category, with the exception of the student category, which tracked those enrolled in higher education.[327] Women clearly had an important role in providing education, even if their access to that education remained unequal.

The literacy statistics in the census demonstrate a steady rise in female access to basic education. The 1895 census reported that 41.5% of women could read and write, while only 18.3% could do so in 1869 (as opposed to 49.2% of males in 1895 and 25.2% in 1869).[328] In 1914, female literacy reached 52.2%, and by 1946 it approached 85% (male literacy reached 50.8% and 88% in the same years).[329] While educational opportunities were not yet equal for men and women, women clearly had the potential to exert great influence over the education system. Feminists determined to wield that influence to the benefit of women in Argentina. As feminists looked to the vote as a means for women to improve society, so they looked to education as a means to make women fit for the full rights of citizenship. As educational opportunities for women expanded, so to did the potential for women to become a political force in Argentina. Feminists worked constantly to reinforce the argument that women's education not only needed to be improved, but deserved to be improved. In this way, they worked to reinforce the case for the vote.

The Feminist Education Agenda

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[327] República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional*, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de LJ Rosso y Cía, 1916), 397.

[328] *Segundo censo de la República Argentina Mayo 10, 1895,* vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Talleres tipográficos de la penitenciaria nacional, 1898), 81.

[329] República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional*, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de LJ Rosso y Cía, 1916), 433; Presidencia de la Nación, *IV censo general de la nación,* vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Dirección nacional del servicio estadistico, 1947), 22.

The idea of education as a necessary precursor to suffrage formed a constant theme in feminist literature. Some writers expressed this theme quite bluntly. María LaCerda, for example, believed that "only the instructed woman will understand why they say: One does not ask for liberties, one conquers them." Having done so, she was confident that women would overcome their subservient role in society.[330] Others took on a milder, if no less plain, tone, arguing that for suffrage to be effective "it is necessary to prepare our women and make them aware of the enormous power their opinion represents."[331] Even anarchist feminists, who did not believe in suffrage as an effective political tool, encouraged women to become more active politically in order to ensure that their children would become free and worthy individuals.[332] As the suffrage law approached, the mainstream press demonstrated that it had accepted these arguments. *La nación,* for example, editorialized that "the aptitude of women to exercise their civic duties is not uniform" and called on political parties to make sure that women would be ready to vote.[333] Peronists perpetuated these fundamental arguments, calling for efforts to prepare women to exercise their new rights and to show her that her family "is not made up solely of her husband, her children, etc., but also the human race represented by the people, the nation, the homeland."[334] Suffragists and peronistas alike embraced education as a

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[330] LaCerda de Maura, *¿La mujer es una degenerada?*, 73.

[331] "Opina la Federación de Mujeres Universitarias sobre el voto femenino," *La Prensa*, 19 July 1945.

[332] "La mujer y la sociedad," *El Libertario*, 1 December 1927.

[333] "Significación del sufragio femenino," *La Nación,* 5 September 1947.

[334] "Ha cambiado el rol femenino en el mundo moderno: Debe actuar política y socialmente," *Democracia,* 1 March 1947.

basic prerequisite to political participation. Feminists therefore built a strong argument around the need to improve female education.

In order to advance women in education, and therefore their right to participate in politics and the life outside the home, suffragists had to overcome two critical obstacles. First was the idea that women were unfit for anything beyond the domestic realm. As we have already seen, part of the argument against suffrage consisted of the belief, supposedly grounded in science, that women were inherently unfit for public life. Some critics even went so far as to claim that educating women beyond the minimal requirements of literacy would result in physical and mental degradation. Feminist leaders often made use of their personal experience to contradict such claims- being educated clearly had not caused them any harm.[335] "If these great philosophers" wrote Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, "had been able to see the thousands of intelligent faces animated against their theories by a deprecating smile, they would have felt humiliated before those they tried to belittle."[336] Feminists did not deny, however, that educating women would be a great burden. The difficulty,however, lay not in women's ability to learn, but rather in prejudices that rejected the notion that women could excel in higher education**.** Women, the feminists argued, had already shown their ability to seize opportunities when they arose. Now they had to convince the male-dominated society that it was in their best interest to encourage women to make use of such opportunities, at the same time convincing women to pursue higher education.[337]

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[335] LaCerda de Maura, *¿La mujer es una degenerada?* 22-3. LaCerda herself was childless, but she said that her political activism and education began well after it had become apparent that she was sterile. She made this point to debunk the belief that higher education made women infertile. Many other feminists were mothers themselves.

[336]Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane,. "La campaña feminista Argentina." In *La mujer:* 77.

[337] Lacerda de Maura, *¿La mujer es una degenerada?* 11-2; Zubiaur, J. B. "Feminismo." In *La mujer: Encuesta feminista argentina*, ed. Miguel J. Font (Buenos Aires: n., 1919), 51-2. Zubiaur argued that World War I provided an excellent example of women's ability to function outside of

As with the vote itself, potential disruption of society represented the most crucial objection to educational reform. Feminists therefore had to articulate a contradictory argument- that education would improve society without fundamentally altering it in any way. This issue, too, elicited unambiguous prose. "Do not believe by any means that instructing women will create war between the sexes," declared María Espíndola at the 1910 women's congress, "No! The enlightened woman will draw closer to her life companion, she will understand him better…in that home they will need neither civil laws nor morals to live together; because their souls will be united." It would be impossible for women to forget their role in any case, another participant of the congress argued, because "women cannot forget the principle of their original design, which is of divine precedence as old as the world."[338] In this way, feminists both accepted and rejected the arguments of their critics. They did not challenge the notion that women were inherently well suited for work in the home. Yet they claimed that the virtues that made them such excellent caretakers of the home would also allow them to improve society in a wider and more immediate sense. It remained for feminists to prove that women's involvement in public life would, in fact, be beneficial.

By becoming educators, women demonstrated one of the means by which their participation in public life could bring domestic virtue into the wider world. Problems such as illiteracy, they argued, could be overcome through the efforts of "intelligent and disinterested [women] … who understand the moral benefits of complying with a duty or bringing relief to the unfortunate."[339] As we have already

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the home as female workers across Europe took up the slack left by the men who had gone off to fight.

[338] María Espindola, In *Primer congreso femenino internacional de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: A. Ceppí, 1911), 49; Argamedo, M. Aurora. *Primer congreso femenino,* 71.

[339] "Para combatir el analfabetismo," *Unión y Labor,* November 1909, p. 14.

seen, the idea that women's education was both a sign and a cause of progress predated the suffrage movement by several decades.[340] Some feminists even declared that educating women would cure society of all its ills. Speaking at the first congress, Ernesta López said that an educated woman could resist negative impulses such as vanity or ambition and that society would be better for it.[341] Modesta Robeledo put the matter in even stronger terms- "How many men would not be superficial, how many criminals would not have become ones…how many women would have avoided a life of vice and misery unto death…if they had had an intelligent and foresightfull mother."[342] While raising a virtuous generation could only be construed as a long-term solution to society's ills, feminists clearly believed that women could and would change the nation for the better if given the chance.

Feminists did not necessarily expect women to change society through political activism alone. The home became the chief focus for feminist educational reformers. Feminists charged women with reforming society from their position as mothers. This meant that mothers had to be educated in order to prevent "the ignorance of the mother turning itself…into a setback for the child, causing him to waste his own efforts later on in his education."[343] But educated wives and mothers would also bring a short-term benefit by promoting domestic tranquility. For this, educators had to take their duties of teaching young women seriously, for only then could women "be made mistresses of a balanced organism, rich in strength and capable of acting fully against the pain, fatigue and the thousand setbacks to which her position in the family exposes her." This

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[340] Sarmeinto, *Educación popular* 137, 148-9.

[341] Ernesta A. López in *Primer congreso,* 40-1.

[342] Modesta Robeledo de Alanís Plaza, *Primer congreso,* 113.

[343] Ernesta López, in *Primer congreso,* 41.

would ensure that her family would be well cared for.[344] Feminist educators argued that, through learning, women could and would reform society without fundamentally altering their position within it.

In order to guarantee that women could exercise this benevolent influence on the community and the nation, feminist educators emphasized the need to properly train girls for their future roles as mothers. A great deal of the literature that feminists produced on the subject of education underscored this concern. For many argentine feminists, the words "mother" and "woman" were synonymous, and "the only duty that women have a right to demand is that of being a good and capable a mother as possible."[345] This is not to say that they believed all young women would become mothers, or that motherhood represented their only function. Indeed, they argued that education should prepare women to "be useful in any situation that they may find themselves in life."[346] Nevertheless, even the most radical feminists in Argentina believed that women "had been born for the home, that she reigns over it and that this is the most noble aspiration of her heart."[347] The possibility, if not the reality, of motherhood defined what it meant to be a woman for educators, whether feminist or not. For educators concerned with girls' and women's education, therefore, preparation for maternal duties became the litmus test for judging the quality of the education system.

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[344] *Ibid.* 40.

[345] Raquel Camaña, "Servicio femenino obligatorio," *La Escuela Popular,* 1:7, 8 May 1913.

[346] Julia M. de Moreno in *La mujer*, 175.

[347] Elvira V. López, *El movimiento feminista* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1901), 17. An example of a more radical feminist's attitude may be found in the anarchist newspaper *La Protesta,* in which an anarchist feminist describes the need for men capable of "bringing about the triumph of greater love and equality; and, to make strong men…women, mothers are a capital necessity." M.T. Manresa, "La educación de la mujer," *La Protesta,* 16 June 1917.

Those feminists who examined female education in Argentina generally found it wanting, particularly in the first quarter of the century. The Consejo Nacional de Mujeres published a number of essays that painted a dismal picture of women (and men as well) who, "lacking resources to obtain classic works that illuminate the mind," found themselves cut off and stunted in their mental development. Others reported that practical education of daughters "was ignored by families" that preferred to provide their daughters either with an "ornamental and showy" education or required their labor at home or in the workplace.[348] Socialist feminists shared this dim view of educational opportunities at the turn of the century, asserting that women "only had the confessional for a school" and that that led to nothing but ignorance and "a refined hypocrisy."[349] Nevertheless, some of these feminists also observed improvements in the educational opportunities open to most women and cheered these developments. Elvira López, for example, observed that the idea of improved teaching for women elicited a "favorable reaction" and that more girls entered secondary school "side by side with men."[350] Nevertheless, two decades later feminists could still say that at the age when "their brothers dedicate themselves to more serious studies, the woman begins the period when she forgets the little she has learned."[351] The give and take between these two perspectives continued throughout the first half of the 20th century. On one side were those that focused on the advances women gained in education. These writers acknowledged that there had been

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[348] "Educación de la mujer argentina," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 280; Mercedes Pujato Crespo, "Importancia de la actuación de la mujer intelectual como factora del progreso social en las provincias," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 3:11, September 1903, p. 17; Elvira López, "La mujer en la Argentina: Costumbres, educación profesiones a que se dedica, datos estadísticos, legislación, etc.," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, June 1902, p. 34.

[349] Alma Negra, "La sociedad y la mujer," *La Vanguardia,* 31 March, 1900.

[350] Elvira López, "La mujer en la Argentina…" 34.

[351] "Educación de la mujer argentina," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 280.

advances in teaching child care, for example, or that times had changed and women had access to education that matched their intelligence.[352] On the other were those who warned of poorly educated women who "were incapable of discerning what is good or bad in their actions." Still others worried that in an increasingly technical and knowledge-based society, uneducated women would find themselves reduced solely to their "sexual function."[353] Whether positive or negative, feminists believed the future rested in the hands of the nation's mothers and devoted a great deal of thought towards what these mothers needed to improve their ability to fulfill their awesome role as the builders of the future.

In order to make certain that women would be equal to the task set before them, feminists paid particular attention to the two portions of the official curriculum that they believed had the greatest bearing on women's lives- moral education and the sex-specific domestic economics courses. These courses reflected what Emilia Salza called the "two administrations women must have in mind", these being the "moral" and "maternal". The moral administration referred to the example mothers must set for their children. To Salza, a mother must "be an example in everything: in actions, words, desires, manners, so that the greatest moral health…reigns over the home." The maternal administration referred to the practical aspects of running the home, and implied frugality and careful attention to the needs of the family.[354] In order to teach morality in the schools, feminists emphasized learning by example, as opposed to simply telling

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[352] "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* June/July 1913, p. 2; Aurora Alicia Faya, "El voto femenino," *Vida Femenina*, April, 1936, p. 20.

[353] "Educación de la mujer argentina," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 280; Olive Schreiner, "La mujer y la guerra," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1916, p. 75.

[354] Emilia Salza, *La economía domestica al alcance de las niñas* (Buenos Aires: Cabaut y Cía, 1901), 8-9.

students what good and bad behavior meant.[355] As we shall discuss below, the exact means of conveying this morality provoked intense debate amongst educators, particularly between those who desired an active role for religious entities in moral education and those who secular education. Domestic education allowed for a more hands-on approach for feminists seeking to improve the instruction girls received. Feminists constantly searched for ways to expand the resources available to young women so that they could fully develop their domestic skills. Feminists all agreed that a woman "has, in the home, her small State in which she rules supreme or in which, at least, she exerts an enormous influence" and that well-educated mothers meant functioning and contented homes.[356] Men, presumably, had less influence on the workings of the home, and argentine feminists did not seem to mind this lack of participation on their part.[357]

While feminists might not have included men in the women's sphere of the home, they did make the case for women becoming a part of both the domestic and public realms of society. Even conservative feminists expressed the need for women to educate themselves "for the home, society, and professional careers."[358] While continuing to prioritize the home, feminists nevertheless recognized the importance of women being able to engage in the modern workforce. However, socialist feminists emphasized that women did so to aid their families and society, and that without the necessary education they would

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[355] Rodolfo Rivarola, "Influencia de la legislación actual a la inmoralidad y el delite desde la edad infantil, y bases para una reforma," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* September/October 1932, p. 8.

[356] Amadeo, *La redencióón por la mujer*,17.

[357] The anarchist feminist M.T. Manresa, for example, declared that mothers had a more "intimate connection" with children, and that fathers had to be more concerned with going out and earning a living. "La educación de la mujer," *La Protesta,* 15 June, 1917.

[358] López, *El movimiento feminista,* 19-20.

become a burden.[359] Even the mainstream press came to accept this point of view. An editorial in *La Prensa*, while cautioning that women "should in no case suffocate their femininity," encouraged them to "confront greater responsibilities" and "intensify their knowledge". The editorial even went so far as to praise those women that had "immortalized their names by transcending the limits of the home."[360] The feminists, in this case, had clearly gotten their message across- better education would "elevate woman's intelligence" without "stealing either the wife or the mother from the home."[361] As we shall see, the forms this education could take varied according to the ideology of those discussing it. However, feminists of different stripes could agree that preparing women for their responsibilities required more than relying on the State alone. Parents, and mothers in particular, faced the heaviest burden of responsibility in shaping the next generation.

To feminists, blame for the gaps in girls' education rested with all sectors of society, but women themselves had to take the lead in rectifying the situation. , In her study of feminism, Elvira López asserted that men trained women "to be weak in resisting them, even though later they condemn them for it." On the other hand, women "are inclined, as is natural, to be pleasing to him" and therefore cooperate in their own oppression.[362] Other feminists saw these "natural" qualities deriving from parental influence rather than inherent qualities. "The father as well as the mother" wrote one feminist educator, "will not rest until certain of being able to provide a career, a profession to their sons"; at the same

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[359] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Feminismo e intelectualismo," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1910, p. 28-9.

[360] "La educación de la mujer," *La Prensa,* 23 May 1926.

[361] "El elevado feminismo del consejo," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 26:94-5, May 1926, p. 115.

[362] López, *El movimiento feminista,* 72.

time these parents would limit the activities of their daughters. Recognizing the impressionable nature of children, these feminists held no doubt that such treatment early in life resulted in a mindset of inferiority that prevented women from ever reaching their full potential.[363] While these constraints might derive from all parts of society, mothers nevertheless became the primary focus of feminist efforts in improving the situation in which young girls found themselves. This focus can be explained in part by the belief that women controlled the domestic environment, as discussed above. Since women enjoyed the greatest control over the first impressions that children might receive, it followed that they carried the greatest responsibility. Furthermore, feminists expected mothers to be the ones most interested in their arguments, since education of the children fit in with the mother's duties so neatly. Finally, mothers served as an obvious role model for their daughters, and therefore as a model for girls seeking to find their own path in life. The difficulty lay in the problem of overcoming societal barriers by relying on women who, presumably, had already adapted themselves to, if not embraced, those very barriers.

Feminists provided considerable advice to help mothers deal with their own limitations while preparing them to be fit educators of their own children. The first step towards accomplishing this improvement lay in convincing mothers of the importance of their influence on young children. Feminists as radically divided as anarchists and conservatives exhorted mothers with the warning that if they remained ignorant or prone to vice or idleness, then "all other advances in instruction will be in vain and sterile" and that women must therefore improve themselves. In other words, it became necessary to "educate the educators."[364]

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[363] "Educación de la mujer argentina," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 279-80.

[364] M.T. Manresa, "La educación de la mujer," *La Protesta,* 15 June, 1917; María Riva de la Hitte, "La madre," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 9:29-30, June 1908, p. 26-8; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Evolución y educación," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1915, p. 227.

Feminists also extolled the virtues of motherhood, underscoring the nobility of the "maternal transmission of knowledge" that even the best teacher could only dream of performing.[365] In this way, they sought to encourage women in their domestic role. Nevertheless, feminists made clear their concern that "the immense majority of mothers only occupy themselves with the external and superficial" aspects of their jobs.[366] The feminists took it upon themselves to instruct their audience in just what a good mother should and should not do in order to raise their children well.

The values feminists hoped to instill in children could be defined by what they sought to avoid as much as the ideals they wished to encourage. One feminist educator, for example, observed that "many mothers use fear as a weapon to command obedience" but that this technique ultimately caused more weakness than strength in children.[367] Anarchist feminists gave the most detailed list of ideas that mothers should reject. Anarchist mothers should avoid teaching children religion, which "atrophies the mind"; they should not instill patriotism because "nature has no boundary lines"; and they should eschew "bourgeois morality" because it "subjects our children to the chains of slavery."[368] To counterbalance these negatives, feminists reiterated that morality "is formed through a series of habits" and that mothers needed to be "virtuous" and "always show ourselves to be simple and truthful, practicing and defending justice, [and]

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[365] Emilia M. Salza, "La común educadora de la mujer en la Argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 4:12, December 1903, p. 21.

[366] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Como se transforma el hogar," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1910, p. 487.

[367] María L. Berrondo, *El miedo como instrumento corruptor del pueblo* (Buenos Aires: Partido Socialista, 1948), p. 14.

[368] María Carmen Feijoó, ed. *La voz de la mujer: periódico comunista-anárquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997), p. 101-2.

dignifying our moral selves."[369] The definition of morality varied, but the need to uphold personal liberty proved to be a common theme. Many feminists believed that "God created man to be free" and that the more freedom allowed a child at a young age, the better they would use their freedom as an adult. At the same time, children must learn to avoid abusing the liberty of others, for only in this way could they guard against others abusing them.[370] While it might appear that any mother would seek to convey good moral values in women, feminists recognized three obstacles that prevented them from doing so- indifference, ignorance, and insufficient resources. These problems, which might be considered ubiquitous, came to be identified with particular social classes of women, eliciting specific responses from feminists. In doing so, feminists needed to reconcile social differences among women. While recognizing these differences, feminists would also point to the common desires of all women.

While aspiring to equality between the sexes, feminists also realized that they also had to seek equality among women. Alicia Moreau de Justo, for example, recognized the "psychological abyss" separating the "simple illiterate woman, nurtured in superstition and beliefs that make her a contemporary of the age before the printing press and the young university woman that selflessly aspires to conquer the highest forms of learning."[371] Only through expanded education could women begin to bridge these gaps among themselves. Lack of opportunity was not the only problem, however. Feminists also realized that there were women, chiefly of the upper class, who seemed to justify "the so often wielded reproach that complete indifference to political matters is a specifically

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[369] Clemencia Jacquinet, "Los factores de la educación," *Francisco Ferrer,* num. 8, 15 August 1911; Justa Burgos Mayer, "Educación moral," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1910, p. 314.

[370] Angel Ossorio, *Diálogos femeninos,* (Buenos Aires: Argos, 1947), 91-3; Horacio B. Rossati, "A las mujeres," *La Protesta,* 2 August 1908.

[371] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 265.

female trait."[372] These women, too, needed an education that better suited them. As one participant in the first congress put it, it would be hypocritical to accuse wealthy, apolitical women of frivolity, and then encourage them to be frivolous.[373] Through education, feminists sought to change society's opinion of what women could be. To do so, feminists attempted to convince women to overcome preconceived notions of femininity.

To some feminist educators, there was "nothing more blame-worthy and more dangerous than affecting not to see, not to know, not so much from indifference, but for a lack of courage to confront difficult situations."[374] Feminists tended to identify this indifference with upper-class women in particular. Upper class women, according to this line of reasoning, men may once have been able to oppress women physically, but "physical force can dominate a woman's body and not her mind." If a woman were mentally deficient, it could only be because she "left the work to her companion in order to devote her time to leisure and intrigue."[375] This frivolity came to define upper class women in the view of many feminists, and extended into feminist attitudes towards charity, a field of endeavor upper-class women dominated. Feminists also expressed conviction, however, that frivolity could be destroyed through education, especially with proper moral training.[376] The life of luxury did not necessarily mean that women had become less intelligent- it just meant that lack of intellectual activity had made it appear so. This, in turn, made it easier to justify denying women the opportunity to

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[372] *Ibid.,* 111.

[373] Modesta Robeledo de Alanis Plaza, In *Primer Congreso*, 114; Humano Ortíz, *Emancipación de la mujer*, 10.

[374] Laura Ratta de Henri, "¿Puede la mujer argentina influir en la formación de un tipo nacional?," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 7:25-6, June 1907, p. 29.

[375] Herminia C. Brumana in *La mujer,* 192-3.

[376] Juan Ignacio Cendoya in *La mujer*, 176.

pursue education on an equal basis with men. To break out of this vicious cycle, women had to prove that they were indeed capable of appreciating and utilizing learning.[377] Upper and middle class women, presumably, already had the resources to pursue higher education. Feminists therefore emphasized reawakening the desire to seek knowledge and the benefits it could bring.

In discussing the educational needs of working class girls and women, feminists tended to focus on lack of resources and their consequences. Socialist feminists assumed that working class women wanted to pursue education but could not do so due to circumstances beyond their control. Carolina Muzzilli, one of the few self-taught feminist leaders, expressed confidence that working class women would embrace education once they became aware of its advantages. Education meant not only the ability to improve one's economic position, she argued, but would also allow a woman to fully comprehend the laws, institutions and rights that defined her role in society. Once these concepts are understood, it would become possible for these women to work for beneficial changes in the social structure.[378] Alicia Moreau de Justo added a related consideration- that education could help prevent the exploitation of young women by criminals as well as by unscrupulous industrialists. Without proper instruction, women would work "at the behest of others" and not of their own volition.[379]

Concern over exploitation led, in turn, to consideration of another serious issue, the "real or pretend poverty so frequently invoked in order to make children work instead of going to school." For socialist feminists in particular, child labor

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[377] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Feminismo e intelectualismo," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1910, p. 29-30; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "La inferioridad de la mujer," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1916, p. 20-1.

[378] Carolina Muzzilli, "Emancipación de la mujer," *La Vanguardia,* 26 September 1910; Francisco P. Súnico, "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1918, p. 26-7.

[379] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Doña Juana Pueblo y la cooperación libre," *Vida Femenina*, August 1935; "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* March 1912, p. 21.

represented a fundamental social problem. They proposed the solution of paying families a "scholarship" for each school-aged child in order to encourage parents to keep children in school.[380] In this way, socialist feminists expected to combat both poverty and crime. For feminists of all ideologies, "misery precipitates crime", and children were especially vulnerable to the threats a life of poverty posed.[381] Both socialist and conservative feminists used their publications to reproduce stories of children who faced a life of crime because of the extreme poverty in which they lived.[382] Feminists sought to mitigate these dangers by providing services both to children and to criminals in order to sway them from a life of vice.[383] Regarding children and especially young girls, nothing mattered more than teaching them to be responsible citizens:

> If we could teach all girls by word and example that their first duty from the time they are born until the day they die is to maintain their personal dignity intact and immaculate, there would be very few that allowed themselves to be seduced by such base desires as luxury, pleasure, etc.[384]

In every case, three patterns emerge in the opinions feminists expressed on the subject of education. First, women required protection from the ills plaguing society. Second, women were by no means innocent of the problems afflicting

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[380] "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* January 1912, 2; "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* February 1912, 2. Lack of education was only one ill consequence of female and child labor in the eyes of feminists- see chapter six.

[381] "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* May 1913, p. 2.

[382] Julia S. de Culto, "La casa del niño," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1913, p. 68-87; Adela Castell de López Rocha, "Sobre los penados," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 15:55-6, November 1915, p. 45-6.

[383] "Notas de redacción," *Unión y Labor,* February 1913, p. 2.

[384] Emma C. de Bedogni, "Obras y reformas sociales," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 8:32, December 1908, p. 35.

them. Finally, every feminist writer had a prescription for overcoming the obstacles that women faced and confidence in their own remedies. These problems, feminists argued, could be overcome once women recognized that they could and should work together and overcome them, regardless of social or economic status. What goals a united women's movement should seek, however, remained at issue.

Feminist Educational Reforms: Debate and Implementation

In their efforts to improve education in Argentina, feminists encountered many of the same difficulties that they encountered in the women's suffrage campaign. Different feminists had different priorities for educational reform, which led to division. They also had to convince those in charge of the educational system, a group consisting almost entirely of men, that the proposed reforms would indeed benefit society without radically altering it. The development of Kindergarten programs and the removal of strictly Catholic moral education fit in well with this strategy, as both matched prevailing political trends of the day. However, the introduction of sexual education or co-education would have resulted in alterations of relations between the sexes, and education authorities ultimately proved unwilling to make such changes.

When looking at specific changes to be made to education as practiced in Argentina, feminists leaned towards the Italian Montessori school as a model for the nation. This system, which promoted "active discipline" and hands-on learning appealed greatly to socialist feminists in particular.[385] According to Montessori, she had designed her method to help children come to realize the benefits of "useful acts" not simply by telling them what to do, but to allow them to

[385] María Montessori, "La disciplina basada en la libertad," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1915, p. 243-4.

discover the truth behind the principle.[386] These feminists understood this method to be one of observation, based on "the liberty of the child- liberty and activity." They idea was for children to learn discipline on their own, free from artificial constraints.[387] Such liberty, they felt, would erase social prejudices and avoid the pitfalls of the system of "rewards and punishments that commonly exists in our schools and makes our children pedantic and egoistic."[388] This method clearly called for a great deal of empathy and patience on the part of the teacher, something which women supposedly possessed in abundance. To implement this system, however, would require a radical change in the Argentine school system. Feminists recognized that changes to the existing school system would be an uphill battle, based as it was on popular scientific grounds and on European models.[389]

The Montessori method faced an uphill battle to gain acceptance in Argentina. In 1909, Sara Justo and Matilde Flairoto de Ciampi visited Montessori in Italy to learn her method first-hand, and the two returned convinced of the benefits of her technique. It was not until the 1920's, however, that this advocacy came to fruition. By that time, Montessori schools had already become established in many European countries and the United States. In 1926, Flairoto and her husband, who operated a school for the mentally handicapped, invited Montessori to Argentina in order to determine the possibility to expanding her system there. From that point on, Montessori schools began to operate in

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[386] *Ibid.,* 253.

[387] Sara Justo. "El método Montessori." *Unión y Labor*, November 1909, p.18.

[388] Matilde Flairoto. "El método Montessori." *Unión y Labor,* December 1909, p. 22-3.

[389] "Historia del método Montessori." *Unión y Labor*, October 1909, p. 2.

Argentina, though they remained but one part of the school system in the nation.[390]

While many of the educational theories embraced by feminists found a degree of acceptance, the practices they sought to implement could arouse intense controversy. The most heated debates often centered on religious teaching in the schools. As discussed above, law 1420 included "morality and manners" among the required subjects for all students, while permitting specific religious instruction only by "authorized ministers" to children of that faith, and only before or after class.[391] While establishing the principle of secular education, the inclusion of "morality" as a subject allowed for the possibility of religious instruction during regular class time. Certain educators believed that it was impossible to teach morality without including God, and that "the habit of prayers, the practice of the same religious rites" would counteract "human weakness" in ways a godless morality could not.[392] The debate over religious instruction in the schools therefore remained alive throughout the first half of the 20th century.

The possibility of formal, obligatory religious instruction to all students worried many feminists, especially the socialists, who tended to see the Catholic Church as an antagonistic force. Both sides attributed great ills to the other's stance on education. To Catholics, the "wave of materialist barbarism" that had "covered a large part of the Republic" would surely "provoke God's justice" and lead to social and political chaos. Secular education formed a part of this "wave" because the education of children was in the hands of the "anti-Christian

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[390] "Una prestigiosa educadora llegó ayer en Buenos Aires," *La Nación,* 4 September 1926.

[391] República Argentina, *Colección completa de leyes nacionales* (Buenos Aires: La Facultad, 1918), 32-4.

[392] Antonio Leroy Beauleu in *La moral sin Dios* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Luz, 1934), 14.

faction."[393] Conservative feminists tended to be sympathetic to Christian values forming a part of the moral education program of schools, so long as it remained "practical"- that is, "it should not consist of daily prayers alone, but also practicing love for one's neighbor in daily life."[394] However, this approval of religious-based education did not necessarily translate into campaigns to change the education code, but rather as a motive to support Catholic schools.[395] As was typical for the conservative feminists, they left the political debates to others while focusing their energy on projects.

Socialist feminists, on the other hand, placed a heavy emphasis on defending the principle of secular education. They felt that Catholics made their dire predictions of the consequences of lay education to "put pressure on those who do not think things through", and that they were wrong to blame all social ills on the lack of state-sponsored religious teaching.[396] Indeed, they argued that teaching religion to children made them "gullible and superstitious." Moreover, not everyone followed the same religious paths- enforcing the teaching of one doctrine would inevitably lead to persecution or violence.[397] The secular school system not only eliminated this potential conflict, but also gave children the option

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[393] Pablo Ramella, *Reformas a la constitución de San Juan: palabras esperanzadas sobre el futuro de San Juan* (San Juan: N. Uribe Yanzán, 1943), 33-5. While addressing the exclusion of religion in San Juan's institutions in particular, Ramella made clear that he condemned secularism everywhere.

[394] Rosario Pueblo de Godoy, "Actuación de la mujer cristiana en el hogar," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de la Mujer*, 7:15-16, June 1907, p. 30.

[395] See for example "Informe de la escuela Taller de la Congregación del Divino Rostro presentado a la asamblea del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* March-April 1933, p. 35-6.

[396] Esteban Rondenina, "Ofensiva clerical contra la escuela laica," *Vida Feminina,* 8:81-2, July-August 1940, p. 7. See also Américo Ghioldi, "Más sobre el pecado de los maestros argentinos," *Vida Femenina*, November 1934, p. 20-1.

[397] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Doña Juan Pueblo habla de la escuela laica," *Vida Femenina*, August 1934, p. 19-20.

of choosing their own moral path in life.[398] In addition, socialists and other feminists pointed out that the State itself did not endorse a particular religion, and that schools had to be open to all citizens, regardless of religion or any other condition.[399] Secular education did not necessarily have to be anti-religious, since it by no means prevented anyone from following their own conscience.[400] Indeed, socialists argued that official sponsorship of a given religion in the schools was the truly anti-religious policy, for it amounted to an intrusion of the State into the private religious beliefs of the family.[401] Little room existed for compromise on religious education under such circumstances, and the preservation of the secular school came to form the central pillar of socialist feminist educational policy.[402]

Feminists also encouraged the implementation of co-educational schools. Here, too, feminists intended to prepare women for a larger role in society. To feminists, it appeared illogical, not to say detrimental, to isolate girls from society

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[398] Bernardina Dabat de López Elitcherry in *Una campaña laica: el cincuentenario de la ley de educaión común* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Luz, 1934), p. 51.

[399] Juan Negro, "Hay que reconquistar la escuela laica," *Vida femenina*, January-February 1940, p. 22.

[400] J. Eduardo Ferreira in *Una campaña laica*, 21; Jean Jaurés, *La instrucción moral en la escuela* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Luz, 1933), 10-11.

[401] "Defendemos la escuela laica," *Mujeres argentinas,* Num 11, 15 December 1946, 2. The struggle over religious education intensified in this year as the Peronist government allowed for religious teaching in schools. This formed one of the principle points of contentions between socialist feminists and peronistas (see chapter 8).

[402] Non-conservative feminists joined organizations designed to promote secular education, see "Liga de la cultura laica," *Vida femenina*, June 1940, 21. Socialist deputies in congress made a number of attempts to remove the article in law 1420 that allowed for religious education outside of normal class hours. See Argentine National Congress, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1918,* v. 2, 25, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1920,* v. 1, p. 635, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1922,* vol. 2, 19 July 1922, p. 26, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1926,* v. 2, p. 506, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1938,* v. 3, p. 635, See also Flora Hillert, Leonardo Paso, Rubén Cucuzza, Rosa Nacimento and León Zimmerman, *El sistema educativo argentino: Antecedentes, formación y crisis* (Buenos Aires: Cartago, 1985), 141-54.

in order to prepare them for roles crucial to society. This applied both to women preparing for a purely domestic role or those studying a profession- the former would be stunted, the latter would be a "third sex". What was needed, then, was an education that prepared women for both a profession and domestic tasks. Such training would not cause conflict, because "to be a mother is a mission, not a profession." In other words, learning a trade or profession might be necessary for a woman to survive.[403] Co-educational training would also provide girls with the opportunity to grow into women who were truly men's equals. Under the present system, one feminist argued, girls' abilities (physical and mental) went unused, and therefore were underdeveloped. If girls received the same education as boys, then "they will respond brilliantly to human needs."[404] Separate classes could only instill inequality. Through co-education, feminists hoped to set a precedent for equality between the sexes.

Feminists faced resistance when it came to co-education, much as they had with secular education. As we have seen, Argentina's educational policy had long incorporated the notion of distinct education for girls and boys, and even the feminists themselves recognized the importance of preparing young girls for their future roles as mothers. Certain educational theorists argued that it was "an error to equalize the education of boys and girls, since the latter should be given an orientation adjusted to her sex and to the true nature of her future actions."[405] To some of these thinkers, separating the sexes was a practical matter and nothing more. Other critics took on a more strident tone, emphasizing morality over practicality. These opponents to co-education could "not conceive of a greater folly nor an absurdity as dangerous to the moral health of the generations that will

[403] La Cerda de Moura in Font, *La Mujer* 71-2.

[404] Zeballos in Font, *La Mujer.* 115-6.

[405] Amadeo, *La redención por la mujer*, 13.

follow us." The opponents of feminism did not agree that men and women had "equal rights and obligations." Co-education was simply anathema, a danger to both sexes.[406] The fear of children's "natural curiosity" leading to vice simply posed too much of a risk.[407] Social mores, the target of feminists, also obstructed feminist efforts at reform.

To counteract these arguments, feminists had to prove the benefits of co-education both on the practical and moral levels. Alicia Moreau de Justo pointed out that many other countries made use of co-education without any ill effect. Indeed, as a result of co-education, she said, "the males lost a little of their brutality and violence, they became gentler…" while girls "lost their timidity, became more courageous…" In short, they became better individuals. Other feminists argued that co-education promoted healthy intellectual competition and cooperation among men and women that would benefit the home and society.[408] As for morality, feminists found the concerns of their opponents to be almost absurd. Feminists decried as illogical the separation of children as they learned to participate in a society where men and women interacted regularly. "Marriage itself," they argued, "does not come about by uniting two beings who don't know each other." Dire consequences could result from an artificial separation of the sexes as each would be totally unprepared for interaction with the other. True morality should include teaching men and women how to get along with one another, feminists argued, and where better to learn this than at school?[409] Finally, feminists regarded separate education as a throwback to the colonial era.

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[406] Candido Miron, "Desfiles femeninos," *Bandera Argentina*, 29 July 1938.

[407] Merced Esbunia, "Moral y educación sexual," *Escuela popular,* 1:13, 15 November 1915, p. 12.

[408] Carlota de Gortani Carbajal, "Una opinión sobre la educación coeducativa," *Vida Femenina*, April 1939, 32.

[409] Francisca Jacques, "Co-educación de los sexos," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1912, p. 2-5.

In those days, males were encouraged to develop greater "mental strength" while women were encouraged to avoid effort both mentally and physically.[410] These attitudes persisted because mothers "educated according to the demands of their time" saw their daughters as weak and needing protection.[411] As we have seen, feminists blamed this isolated and limited education for preventing women from being adequate mothers and blocking them from contributing more fully to public life. In spite of these arguments, co-education remained a marginal practice for years to come, coming into practice only in private institutions.

Feminists used arguments similar to those of the co-education debate in an area that elicited equal controversy- sexual education. For some feminists, co-education required sexual education in order to guarantee "a broader and more intimate mutual understanding than currently exists" between the two sexes.[412] For some, including sexual education was a matter of modernity, another way to "leave behind the ignorance that the conservative spirit" had inflicted upon the nation for so long.[413] However, for most feminists public health formed the strongest argument in favor of sexual instruction. The need for future mothers to be educated on this subject, naturally, received special attention. Through sexual education, future mothers would learn the consequences of premarital sex. Moreover, they would be enlisted in the fight against alcoholism, tuberculosis, and venereal diseases and would also learn about genetics and the need to improve the human race through careful reproduction.[414] Ignoring sex, on

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[410] "Educación de la mujer argentina," *Nuestra Causa*, 3:24, June 1921, 278-9.

[411] "Emma C. de Bedogni, "La educación de la mujer," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 9:29-30, June 1908, p. 30-1.

[412] "Conferencia de la señorita Raquel Camaño," *Francisco Ferrer,* Num. 10, October 1911.

[413] Haydee Macier, "Sexo y educación," *Nervio*, 2:14, June 1932, p. 13.

[414] Raquel Camaña, "La cuestión sexual," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1915, p. 444-5.

the other hand, could have dire repercussions. Repressed sexuality could lead to severe psychological complications later on in life, so taking the time to explain the basics of sexuality could prevent problems later on.[415] Catholics objected to the idea, and the feminists took the Church to task for blocking what they saw as a necessary and useful reform.[416] Feminists believed that the best time to begin teaching sexual education was to wait until the child expressed interest in the subject.[417] The campaign for sexual education, despite the controversy surrounding it, did make some progress in the Argentine government. Congress stalled the introduction of the new subject into the curriculum, much as it had stalled on the suffrage issue itself.[418]

Other reforms based on the desire for improved health and hygiene encountered less opposition, and required less intense campaigning on the part of feminists. The introduction of physical education and building playground facilities, for example, fit in well with the overall goal of producing healthy, well-rounded children. These feminists maintained that "the national school is the appropriate place to point the young generation in the right direction" and that "physical health permits one to realize all other ideals" of mental and moral development. Most schools at the beginning of the century, however, only offered a limited program of physical activity as a "luxury" or "complement" to the

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[415] Enrique Anderson Imbert, "Educación sexual," *Vida Femenina,* June 1939, p. 18.

[416] Angel Gimenéz, "La iglesia católica y la educación sexual," *Vida Femenina*, November 1935, p. 28; Raquel Camaña argued that children, being more open to religious sentiment, would more readily understand the sacred nature of sexual relations if they learned about it at a young age- Camaña, "La cuestión sexual," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1915, p. 435.

[417] Telma Reca, *Vida Femenina*, February 1936, p. 12.

[418] Argentine National Congress, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1936,* v. 4, p. 926, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1922,* v. 1, p. 406-411,

usual curriculum, rather than as a "fundamental activity."[419] While the inclusion of physical education into the established program of most schools came along slowly, feminists interested in education found other means to promote exercise and activity among students in the city who, they asserted, were most in need of such programs. Fenia Chetcoff, for example, participated in the creation of public playgrounds and promoted their use as a means of stimulating healthy growth.[420] Others favored the more organized activities of the YWCA, which had established itself in Buenos Aires during the first decade of the century.[421] In later decades, the National Education Council created vacation colonies for urban children with the support of large landowners in rural areas. Feminists, including Alicia Moreau de Justo, embraced this program and encouraged both the government and the landowners to expand the program to accommodate more children for greater lengths of time.[422] While such comments reveal that some feminists might have wished for greater strides in this area, those responsible for education policy accepted the importance of physical education in the schools.[423]

Feminists also supported the introduction of kindergartens as a way to enhance the education of the youngest children. As with physical education this innovation slowly achieved greater acceptance among educators. At the turn of

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[419] Ana B. de Selva, "La salud y los ejercicios físicos," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 10:32, December 1908, p. 38-9.

[420] Marta Ciclero, *Alicia Moreau de Justo,* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994), 155-6.

[421] "Departamento de Educación Física," *Boletin Mensual de la Asociación Cristiana Femenina,* Ocotber 1933, p. 3. The YWCA had been a member of the Concejo Nacional de Mujeres since 1907, and may be considered among the conservative feminist groups.

[422] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "La protección de la infancia: ¿filantropía o justicia social?" *Vida Femenina,* February 1937, p. 4.

[423] Argentine National Congress, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1909,* v. 1, p. 256-60, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1911,* v. 2, p. 433, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1918,* v. 2, p. 677, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1937,* v. 1, p. 123, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1938,* v. 4, p. 3381.

the century, kindergartens were unheard of in Argentina, and the idea required some explaining to those who felt that they would remove children from the home too early. Advocates of kindergartens supported the institution by pointing out that they would supplement mothers, not replace them. In an era in which so many mothers had to seek work, feminists argued, kindergartens would act as "a *shelter,* in the great and noble sense of the word" protecting children from harm and from "bad examples."[424] Despite some resistance, the support of the conservative and left-wing feminists proved sufficient to allow the introduction of kindergartens on a trial basis, and national organizations formed in order to create and operate kindergartens affiliated with particular schools.[425] Over the years, feminists of all kinds came to endorse the expansion of kindergartens as a beneficial institution. As a consequence, the number of kindergartens increased. Feminists found these centers of early schooling to be beneficial because they created a "tender, civilizing, human environment, where good habits flourish and sentiments are purified."[426] As with physical education, the theory of kindergarten did not encounter much opposition on the way to implementation.[427]

Feminists did not focus on early education alone, but on university-level instruction as well. Feminists expressed their concerns with higher education in terms of the family, just as they had when discussing primary school. "The University," they believed, "should turn its gaze and its actions toward what has

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[424] J.A Zolezzi de Bermúdez, "Desarrollo y utilidad de los kindergartens en nuestro país," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, March 1902, p. 19 (emphasis in the original).

[425] Laura Ratto, "Literatura pegagógica," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:7, September 1902; Custedia Zuloaga, "Informe de la Sociedad Nacional de Kindergarten," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 7:27, September 1907, p. 27.

[426] Miguel Ninas, "La obra municipal de previsión social: los jardines de infancia," *Vida Femenina*, May 1930,p. 30.

[427] Argentine National Congress, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1933,* v. 2, p. 1005.

been called the *fundamental institution and social cell*, that is, *the family*…in which resides the greatest influence in the formation of individuals."[428] As we have already seen, feminists placed tremendous importance on the roles of families and especially mothers in educating children. They felt that any institution that could improve the ability of women to act as sound mothers deserved their attention. However, the universities themselves were often beyond the means of ordinary women. Feminists leaders, who had benefited tremendously from their own access to higher education, devoted a great deal of time and energy to making educational opportunities available to others. These came in two forms: adult education programs such as the "University Extension curriculum," designed to "contribute to the culture of the people" and technical education programs designed to teach women to produce "useful objects" and learn vocational skills that suited them.[429] In either case, sponsorship and organization of adult learning programs formed one of the most important activities of feminist organizations throughout the first half of the 20th century.[430]

At the national level, feminists proposed a number of different reforms to shape the education system. Taken as a whole, these proposals took in a radical restructuring of the nation's schools and, by extension, society itself.

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[428] Amadeo, *La redención por la mujer*, 16. Amadeo goes on to assert that in terms of influence on a person's development, a priest wields 1%, the school 2%, and the family 97%.

[429] "Extensión universitaria: opinión de la señora Carmen de Pandolfini," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1912, 413; Carolina Freyre de Jaimes, "Profesiones é industrias para las mujeres," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 9:35, September 1909, 27-8.

[430] The congress intervened in feminist projects repeatedly. For examples, see Argentine National Congress, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1925,* v. 1, p. 381, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1926,* v. 2, p. 446, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1926,* v. 4, p. 194, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1926,* v. 8, p. 259, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1928,* v. 1, p. 286, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1929,* v. 1, p. 222, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1933,* v. 2, p. 1004, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1934,* v. 3, p. 10, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1937,* v. 1, p. 357, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1938,* v. 3, p. 3314.

Taken individually, reforms such as sexual education proved sufficiently controversial that their failure was almost inevitable. Nevertheless, as with voting rights, feminists raised awareness of important issues with their petitions and made gender relations a matter of public debate. However, feminists did not rely on the legislature alone, nor did they expect abstract debates to be sufficient cause for societal change. Through their organizations, feminists sought to put some of their educational theories into practice by teaching willing students.

Feminist Education Projects

Education programs often formed an important part of feminist organizations. Feminists perceived education both as an opportunity for self-improvement and as a means to instruct other women in the proper methods and attitudes of political activity. Furthermore, given the importance of mothers as educators of the next generation, promoting education publicly and organizing educational institutions appeared to be an obvious extension of women's "natural" domestic role into the public sphere. Control of these learning facilities could arouse strong passions among the feminists. As we have seen, disagreements over the operation of the Escuela Técnica del Hogar helped prompt the split within the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres. Whether focused on children or adults, the educational facilities created by the feminists inspired intense devotion.

As the first center of its kind, the Escuela Técnica del Hogar served as a model for similar institutions in Argentina. The school's stated purpose was to "disseminate necessary knowledge for women, in order to assure the happiness and relative wellbeing of modest homes."[431] This orientation demonstrates the

[431] "Informe de la presidenta de la subcomision de educación doméstica," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 3:10, June 1903, p. 2-3.

attitude conservative feminists had towards the educational needs of working class women. They presumed that working class women did not already possess these skills and that they were best qualified to instruct their less fortunate sisters. Furthermore, it demonstrates the upper-class belief that domestic skills formed the basis for women's happiness within the home, which constituted the primary field of female activity. Such beliefs may have seemed disingenuous coming from a group of educated, relatively wealthy women, but the promise of enhancing domestic bliss proved sufficient to win support from both the municipal and national government.[432] In other words, the emphasis on domestic skills demonstrated the effectiveness of advancing the idea of women's presence in the public sphere by embracing and extending the domestic role. In later years, the Escuela Técnica del Hogar expanded to include vocational training as well as instruction in foreign languages, fine arts and music.[433] Other female educational institutions followed similar patterns, instructing their students in arts such as dressmaking, shoemaking and embroidery, often selling the products of their students in order to support themselves.[434] These institutions tended to focus on younger women and children, and the press praised the schools for converting the "incorrigible and rebellious" into young people that displayed "exemplary conduct."[435] While the classes exhibited signs of success, it

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[432] Cecilia Grierson, "Informe de la sub-comisión de Educación Domestica," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 4:16, December 1904, p. 38-9; "Informe de la comisión de educación deomestica," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres.,* 8:28, December 1907.

[433] :Informe de la Escuela Tecnica del Hogar de La Plata," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 16:55-6, November 1915, p. 63.

[434] Informe de la secretaria del interior- publicaciones recibidas," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:16, December 1904, p. 16.

[435] "Casas del niño," *La Nación,* 5 September 1926. For other examples of institutions providing similar services, see "La infancia abandonada," *La Nación*, 13 October 1924; Juana Rita Villate de Orami, "Infancia de la Obra de la Conservación de la Fe," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de*

seems clear that these institutions retained the imprint of charitable organizations- the well-off donors providing what they believed the beneficiaries needed. The classes that women's organizations provided did not create a dialogue between women, but rather a way for particular organizations to instill their ideas in others.

Socialist and other left-wing feminists did not neglect to make their own contributions to the educational needs of women and children, though their approach differed somewhat from that of the conservative feminists. One group of socialists formed a cooperative that would permit members to afford school materials and construct a small library.[436] Like conservative feminists, socialist feminists sought to expand educational opportunities in response to their own perceptions of what women required. Socialists attributed poor education among working class women to material gaps- lack of time and money- and also of intellectual deficiencies- lack of appreciation of what was worth reading and "lack of a habit of reading."[437] Their solution emphasized the creation of libraries and lecture series, as opposed to the learning institutions favored by the conservatives. These types of programs, they argued, would allow women to "shake off the dust of old traditions" and provide women and men alike with the means to build a better era.[438] One of the foremost means through which the socialists developed these services was the Ateneo Popular, a lecture series organizes by the Socialist party. The Ateneo later included educational journeys for participants, in order to provide workers with a larger experience of their own

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Mujeres, 25:88-90, May 1925, p. 52; "Departamento educativo," *Boletin Mensual de la Asociación Cristiana Femenina,* October 1933, p. 4.

[436] "La cooperación en la escuela," *Vida Femenina*, October 1935, p. 27.

[437] Josefina Marpans, "Las mujeres y las bibliotecas," *Vida Femenina*, February 1935, p. 11.

[438] Carmen S. de Pandolfini, "La obra del Ateneo Popular," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1912, p. 128.

nation.[439] In this way, socialists connected practical education programs with their political agenda, seeking to encourage workers to see the world from a socialist perspective.

While these party-run educational institutions provided some opportunities for working class women, they tended to focus on the city of Buenos Aires. This meant that women beyond the capital, and particularly those in rural areas, were slow to receive the benefits of adult education programs or special schools. This lapse did not go unrecognized, however. Educators and feminists alike became aware of the need to include rural women in their projects and to provide these women with opportunities to thrive economically. "Peasant women," one educator asserted, "in general, are hard working and good natured. But…these good qualities are not adequately used in the sense of economic collaboration with men."[440] Beyond that, women in the countryside wished for more than "ridiculous pedantic erudition" but rather to be "useful in society."[441] Educators identified the growing urbanization of the nation to lack of opportunity in and appreciation for the countryside.[442] Education once again provided a solution to these perceived needs. By creating rural education centers, educators hoped to "awaken a liking for the life and work of the country and provide solid preparation for the infinite and productive domestic tasks" a woman might perform.[443] This

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[439] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Inauguración de cursos del Ateneo Popular," *Humanidad Nueva*, 1912, p. 131-2; Celestina Meliano, "Excursión a La Plata del Ateneo Popular," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1913*,* p. 93-5.

[440] Amadeo, *La redención por la mujer* (Buenos Aires: Grafico Oceano, 1928), p. 9-10.

[441] Mercedes Pujato Crespo, "Importancia de la actuación de la mujer intelectual como factor del progreso social en las provincias," *Revista del Concejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 4:11, September 1903, p. 16.

[442] Graciela Rool de Rueda, "Escuela de Hogar Agrícola," *Boletín mensual del Museo Social Argentino,* 2:13-4, 1913, p. 42.

[443] Nicolás Repetto, "La preparación profesional de las muchachas," *Vida Femenina,* March 1940, p. 4-5.

sort of education, they felt, was essential for women who might not appreciate the "beauty and attractiveness of nature" on their own.[444] In order to instill these values and provide vocational training, educators and feminists supported the creation of centers such as the Hogares Agrícolas. First created in 1909, the Hogares served as boarding schools where girls received a hands-on education in rural tasks as well as domestic skills similar to those taught in the city.[445] As with the urban educational institutions, advocates for these rural schools remarked on the transformation wrought by proper instruction of young women, testifying to the improved living conditions experienced by families who sent their daughters to be trained.[446] Such anecdotes helped reinforce the confidence with which feminists pursued their educational goals. Successful application of their theories validated their belief in women's ability to improve herself and society.

Teacher training also concerned feminists. As we have already seen, the instruction offered through the normal schools represented the principal source of higher education offered to most women, who dominated the field of primary school education. Given their fundamental concern for the proper care and instruction of young children, feminist interest in teacher training is by no means surprising. Feminists praised the dedication women showed to teaching, arguing that they "exercise their profession with much greater love than men, who in general accept this career as a bridge that will ease them into other more lucrative and high-profile jobs."[447] Rather than alter these circumstances,

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[444] Juana Malasorte de Capillo, "Las escuelas de horticultura," *Unión y Labor,* October 1912, p. 28.

[445] Amadeo, *La redención por la mujer,* 5-6, 26.

[446] *Ibid.,* 28-9.

[447] Ernestina A. López, "La mujer en las conferencias pedagógicas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:5, March 1902, p. 20.

feminists sought to bolster women teachers in their chosen profession. Their strategy to do so was two-fold: the creation of technical materials to keep teachers up-to-date on educational techniques and the formation of teacher organizations and unions in order to defend teachers and the important work that they performed.

Feminists frequently made use of the press to advance their ideas. Through journals and other publications, feminists provided professional advice to teachers, both male and female, while promoting their vision of a valuable education. Given the long-standing involvement of women in Argentine education, it is in some ways surprising that, at the beginning of the 20th century, female pedagogical literature was "still in its infancy, being a modern creation of our culture." However, it should be remembered that women had until that point only recently begun to advance into other realms of higher education and to form their own organizations, professional or otherwise. Despite this apparent delay, women produced much that was useful, finding "new and original applications of the great methods" of education and making them comprehensible to the average reader.[448] Published in the 1900's and 1910's, the magazine *Unión y labor* aired opinions on educational theories, such as those of Montessori, and provided teachers with sample lesson plans.[449] In the 1920's, the magazine *La Obra* published news and information for teachers, keeping them up to date on governmental policy as well as advice, lesson plans, and articles on educational theory. One of their first publications, for example, included articles on minimizing classroom distractions, the problem of overcrowded classrooms, and commentary on teacher salaries.[450] Other feminist publications included articles

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[448] Laura Ratto, "Literatura pedgógica," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 3:7, September 1902, p. 20-2.

[449] "Para las alumnas maestras," *Unión y Labor*, April 1912, p. 25.

[450] *La Obra: Revista de Educación, Ciencias y Letras,* 1:2, March 1921.

aimed at teachers as well, providing another glimpse at the concerns feminist leaders had regarding teaching as a profession. Alicia Moreau de Justo, for instance, expressed concern for "fatiguing, monotonous, lackluster, colorless, and therefore uninteresting teaching that is commonly offered to young minds" and urged teachers to work more closely with parents to encourage student's interest in learning.[451] Elia Martínez also addresses this ennui, asserting that women teachers over the age of forty-five tended "to break down physically and mentally" from the intense labor that they performed.[452] These sorts of articles attempted to raise awareness of the particular challenges of a career and education, and served to promote sympathy and support for teachers who sought to improve their working conditions.

The difficulties of the job encouraged teachers to organize for improvements in their status and working conditions, and the number of female teachers made women essential for the success of such organizations. Rhetorically, politicians and government leaders had always shown strong support for teachers and for their contribution to "the progressive forces in the soul of the nation."[453] Nevertheless, some educators felt "not without reason," that their profession "has been compared to a priesthood" was viewed "with indifference, with disdain" in the nation.[454] Not surprisingly, teachers, like so many other occupations, came together to work for improvements in their working conditions, salaries, and even the conditions under which one could join

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[451] Alicia Moreau, "La mal de pereza en la escuela," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1911, p. 227-8.

[452] Elia M. Martínez, "Informe de la comisión de la prensa," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 6:19, September 1905, p. 20.

[453] "Conferencia de profesiones, su inauguración oficial," *Tribuna*, 15 February 1902. The remarks were those of the secretary of education.

[454] "Los derechos de la mujer," *La Razón,* 2 May 1918.

the profession. In 1919, for example, female students of a professional school struck in order to have teaching certificates included with their diplomas. Teaching the subjects they had learned at the school was "the aspiration of many students" and to be denied that certification provoked unrest.[455] That they were willing to resort to a strike to secure the possibility of working as teachers demonstrates the importance that many women attached to education as a career. Issues of pay, however, were more likely to prompt a reaction from teachers. One example of particular note came in 1912, when a member of the national education council attempted to pass a regulation that would have made unequal pay among male and female teachers official policy. The logic behind the move was to attract more men to a profession overwhelmingly dominated by women. Feminists of all types reacted with intense antagonism to the proposal, and the idea died out before it could be implemented.[456] Problems with the education system did not always provoke such a strong response, however. In 1921 the province of Santa Fe, burdened with budget difficulties, failed to pay its teachers for six months. The resulting strike only brought a weak turnout among teachers. Feminist publications sharply criticized the teachers for their lack of "class feeling, collective dignity, sincere idealism"- a far cry from the praise for the "noble profession" expressed by so many others.[457]

Conclusion

[455] "Escuelas profesionales de mujeres, huelgas de alumnas, anecdotas del conflicto," *La Prensa,* 20 July, 1919.

[456] "Grupo femenino 'Unión y Labor' asamblea extrordinari," *Unión y Labor,* November 1912, p. 29-30. One need hardly add that no similar idea ever appeared to attract women to professions in which they were underrepresented.

[457] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "La huelga del hombre- los maestros de Santa Fe," *Nuestra Causa,* 3:24, June 1921, p. 277.

Feminists readily embraced education as a vital sphere of activity for women. They held the firm conviction that "all social transformations have [education] at their base and at their pinnacle."[458] Education reform provided a easily accessible means for feminists to practice both the political activism and the societal improvements they expected to achieve through the vote. Argentine leaders had already created a substantial precedent for female involvement in education well before the organized feminist movement began, and education of children suited the maternal role in a manner that no critic could deny. Feminists made use of these advantages to make the case for expanded female rights, as well as to prepare women for the new responsibilities that lay before them in the workplace and the polling place. In the process, feminists had to overcome long-standing objections to the presence of women in public activities- objections that both men and women raised. By upholding the value of motherhood and placing their desired reforms in the context of expanding the beneficial influence of motherhood, feminists gradually opened the way for women to enter a larger world unhindered.

The projects feminists used to achieve their goals were as varied as the feminists themselves. Left wing feminists tended to favor more radical alternatives in education, such as the Montessori method and the introduction of sex education. Conservative feminists, as might be expected, favored a more traditional approach. Yet there was common ground between the two groups, and those projects that enjoyed support from both sides, such as physical education and the development of kindergartens, met with success at the national level. In addition, both strains of feminism developed adult education programs that emphasized traditional spheres of female activity, such as sewing and cooking. As with political reforms, feminists expected to accomplish great things through education, but also made an effort not to disturb society unduly.

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[458] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Evolución y educación," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1915, p. 223.

However, they could not always avoid disruptions, especially where the working class was concerned. Helping women to improve their social standing inevitably led to debate over the basis for their subjection in the first place, both in the home and in the workplace.

Chapter VI
Working Women and Feminism

> A quick look at the structure of our social economy demonstrates an irrefutable fact. Every day the number of women that seek to make a living through honest work grows among us, and every day the old prejudice that women should remove themselves from the field of active economic production diminishes. We have accomplished a practical feminism without a theory of feminism.
>
> -*La Razón*[459]

> Only when each woman wields a vote can we seriously discuss equal working conditions with men, because only then will the traditional parties work to attract [female voters] to their causes with small concessions, as they do now with male voters. Only then will women cease to be socially defenseless, a condition that currently allows managers to make them compete with male workers, since women do the same work for less pay.
>
> -Josefina Marpons[460]

From the earliest days of the feminist movement, female activists recognized the growth of the female industrial working class as a significant trend. Feminist interpretations of this trend varied according to ideology. Conservatives viewed the growth of female employment as a moral threat and health risk to the women involved and their children. Socialists and Anarchists emphasized the capitalist exploitation of women and underaged workers as a prominent example of the corruption of modern society. Radical and Independent feminists shared elements of the Conservative and Socialist views, recognizing the perils of modern work. However, all feminists agreed on two points regarding female labor in the twentieth century. First, whatever its dangers, the presence of a female working class was an undeniable fact that

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[459] "La mujer en el trabajo," *La Razón*, 27 August 1921.

[460] Josefina Marpons, "Protección a la maternidad," *Vida Femenina*, 3:34, May 1936, p. 30.

could not be ignored or reversed. Second, women workers required protection. The form of this protection varied according to the perspective of the feminist discussing the situation. Nevertheless, most feminist leaders- many of whom had entered the workplace themselves as white-collar professionals- viewed the challenges facing the growing female workforce as a problem to be solved through increased women's rights, including Civil Code reform and suffrage.

Feminists in Argentina acknowledged a variety of factors that contributed to the increase in female labor. Blanca Cassagne Serres highlighted economic necessity, which caused women to become "collaborators in the greater welfare of society." This economic necessity reflected both the needs of the family for greater income and the needs of industry for more labor. However, Cassagne Serres also noticed that women sought work for "spiritual reasons," as a remedy for "sad or bitter women who, if they don't work, become anti-social agents; sick; failed." These "spiritual reasons" seemed to apply more to women of the middle and upper classes that, at least according to popular conceptions, might be expected to live idle lives if they did not work. The presence of women in the workplace, according to Cassagne Serres, was not only positive but also inevitable. Female participation in the economy resulted from "the march of global events." Cassagne Serres claimed that women would have achieved a place of equality with men as producers already if "egos and interests created by reactionaries had not delayed the moment."[461] Thus, given the inevitability of women entering the modern workforce, equal rights for the new workers would become a reality. However, those concerned with these rights- feminists, male politicians and union leaders, and the working class women themselves- did not always agree on what reforms needed to occur.

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[461] Blanca Azucena Cassagne de Serres, *¿Debe votar la mujer? Cultura Cívica Femenina* (Buenos Aires: Editor Licurgo, 1945) 34-5.

Middle and upper class feminist leaders saw working class women as their natural constituents, and made their case for workplace reforms accordingly. While feminist leaders might go to great lengths to investigate the conditions under which most women worked, their responses did not necessarily reflect what those working women truly wanted. Most feminists and working women agreed on the importance of workplace regulations such as limited female working hours. Such regulations would supposedly address both the exploitation leftist feminists decried and the moral decay that Conservatives feared. Other actions from feminist organizations reflected prevailing ideologies rather than the demands of working women. Conservatives tended to encourage the development of domestic skills in order to promote orderly home lives. Leftists tended to emphasize political rights, including suffrage, as a means for women to enhance their status within the workplace. These activities, while helpful to working women, did not always address their priorities, such as pay raises, nor did they overcome male attitudes towards female workers.

The fact of female work had not escaped the attention of male politicians and reformers and, both before and during Perón's presidency in the 1940s, many commentators had discussed the issue of women workers. Over the first decades of the twentieth century, women became a prominent, if not dominant, portion of the labor force in a variety of industries, especially in textiles, tobacco, and shoes. Male workers often resented the presence of female labor, arguing that women worked for less and therefore made it harder for men to earn a living and care for their families. Governments that responded to labor concerns usually enacted reforms with the complaints of male workers in mind, limiting working hours and equal pay legislation in order to make female employees less appealing to industry. Business owners, on the other hand, continued to hire women regardless of legislation. As for union leaders, they officially supported female activity in the labor movement, but privately viewed women workers as

unwelcome competitors in the job market. Whatever men said about the subject, they could not deny the necessity of female labor. Working class families depended on the money women workers brought in, and neither government nor businesses were willing to go to great lengths to curb female employment. Perhaps the greatest proof of societal tolerance, if not approval, of female employment lies in the period before the Civil Code reform of 1926. Prior to the reform, wives had to obtain permission from their husbands in order to take a job. There is no evidence to suggest that husbands in any social category hesitated to give such permission. While working class women did live in an inferior social stratum, no one tried to prevent them from earning a living.[462]

Working class women, despite the limitations imposed on them, worked to influence and change the circumstances of their lives. Through neighborhood associations and unions, working women made their case for improved living and working conditions. As organizers in their neighborhoods, women helped agitate for improvements in the often sub-standard tenement apartments (*conventillos*) prevalent in the first decades of the century. As union activists, women sought to address their particular needs in the workplace. Men tended to dominate unions and the large labor organizations such as the Confederación General de Trabajo (General Labor Confederation) that developed in 1930. However, in industries where women made up the majority of the labor force it was possible for all- or nearly all-female unions to take shape. These women's unions, like their male counterparts, engaged in strikes, negotiations and support activities for their

[462] In her study of working class women in Chile, Elizabeth Hutchinson makes the same point- women faced serious limitations but could not be denied the right to make a living. Hutchinson also provides examples of the lengths women would go to in order to make a living. However, the degree of female activism in the labor movement appeared to be much more intense in Chile than in Argentina until the 1940s. Elizabth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-14. See also Asuncion Lavrin, "Labor and Feminism: Foundations of Change," in *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

members that varied according to the economic climate. The existence of these working class organizations proves that working class women were neither apathetic, submissive, nor ignorant as some critics suggested. However, working class women's participation in unions may explain their lack of interest in other feminist groups. Working women may simply not have had time to join a feminist organization, and even if they did, a union already existed to defend their interests.

The combination of feminist groups, male interest, and women's labor union activity led to legislative action. Starting in the first decade of the twentieth century, Congress passed workplace regulations designed to meet the specific needs of female workers. These regulations provided another field of activity for feminists, who attempted to observe the workplace in order to make certain the businesses complied with the law. Enforcement of workplace regulations always proved more difficult than enacting the regulations, and feminist leaders and union activists alike always had cause for complaint when they investigated emplyer's compliance with the rules. Regardless of the difficulties of work, the experience of labor activism provided a practical political education for women and a demonstration of their talents. This combination of experiences provided a powerful argument in favor of suffrage and the basis for the link between Perón, with his strong working-class appeal, and the working women of Argentina.

Growth of the Female Working Class

Women in Argentina had always worked in one form or another. In the colonial era, women of all social classes often ran household economies and contributed essential items of trade.[463] Women also worked in "public"

[463] Juan Bialet Massé, *La clase obrera argentina a principios del siglo* (Buenos Aires: Secretaría Parlamentaria y Dirección Publicaciones, 1991), 19-20.

businesses such as agriculture, peddling merchandise, and craft-work. They contributed to less visible (or at least less public) labors such as domestic service and the underground economy, most notoriously as prostitutes. The latter was not always an illegal trade in Argentina- quite the contrary, at times the government regulated the oldest profession.[464] However, the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution touched Argentina as they touched the rest of the world, and women found themselves working in fields that had previously been the exclusive province as men. At the same time, women began to enter into white-collar professions as opportunities in education opened to them. The growth of a female industrial working class and a professional class alarmed some and encouraged others, making a national debate over this social shift inevitable.

In the late nineteenth century, men significantly outnumbered women in the Argentine workforce overall, though some occupations saw significant female participation. According to the census of 1895, 87.1% of adult males had a job, versus 41.3% of females. The authors of the census report reasoned that this difference in employment meant that "we as a nation have not yet learned to give a useful and rewarding direction to women's work, and they [women], lacking their own means of subsistence, have to rely on the protection of men." In nearly every major category of employment, men outnumbered women by a substantial margin. For example, only 298 women worked in "public administration" versus 23,686 men, and 10,222 women worked in "commerce" while 133,141 men labored in the same field. Only three categories of labor showed significant

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[464] Mary Karasch, "Suppliers, Sellers, Servants, and Slaves," in *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Louisa Schell Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolow (Albuqueque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Héctor Recalde, "Prostitutas Reglamentadas: Buenos Aires 1875-1934," *Todo Es Historia*, no. 285, March 1991, p. 72-94.

(greater than 30%) female participation. Women made up the vast majority of domestic servants- 199,144, as opposed to 23,686 men in the same category. Women also had a strong showing in instruction and education- 7,207 women and 11,151 men worked in this field. Interestingly, men and women shared "industry and manual arts" almost equally at the turn of the century, with 185,357 jobs and 180,730 jobs respectively. However, the industries in which men and women worked varied widely. Women tended to dominate or show strong participation in areas that closely resembled their domestic tasks. This included most textile and clothing industries as well as food industries such as baking or candy making (though they did almost no work in meatpacking, a vital industry in Argentina's export economy). Women also worked in the production of light consumer goods such as soap, cigarettes, and matches, and the new field of communications as telegraph operators. The growth of a large female workforce led some commentators to come to different conclusions that those of the census reporters. Where the reporters saw a lack of direction in female employment, some observers expressed pleasure that so many women had found employment that was "useful to themselves and to society." Other commentators expressed admiration for women that worked for their families and dismay for the low pay and poor quality of work that female employees had to tolerate.[465] The presence of women in the workplace, while small in some areas, was large enough in certain sectors to attract the interest of reformers. The continued growth of this labor force in the following decade led to action on the part of the government.

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[465] *Segundo censo de la República Argentina, Mayo de 1895*, v. 2 (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Penitenciaria Nacional, 1898), p. CXC-CXCIII and 142; Elvira López, "La mujer en la Argentina: costumbres, educación, profesiones a que se dedica, datos estadísticos, legislación, etc.," *Revista del Conejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 2:6, June 1902, p. 36; Elena Gil, *La mujer en el mundo de trabajo* (Buenos Aires: Libera, 1970), 40-3; Mario Bravo, *Derechos civiles de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1927), 111.

Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, the female workforce continued to expand at a steady pace. This growth contributed to the overall expansion of the working class in Argentina, largely fueled by high European immigration. The overall increase in the number of working class men and women contributed in turn to government and elite concerns over social order, particularly in the wake of large-scale strikes and riots in 1902, 1910, and 1919. Census data from 1914 revealed that women continued to dominate particular fields, though the relative numbers in professional categories changed. For example, the relative parity in the number of men and women working in industry disappeared as the number of male workers surged. On the other hand, by the 1914 census women came to hold the majority of positions in education and in select businesses, such as telephony. Women also continued to hold the majority of jobs in the clothing and household commodity industries.[466] These employment patterns held true throughout the first half of the twentieth century, shaping the structure of working class organization throughout the period. The growth of feminism also responded to shifts in employment, as a new female professional class emerged.

In the 1890's, women who had taken advantage of higher education began to enter into their professional careers. Many of these women, most notably doctors such as Cecilia Grierson and Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, also made their mark on the Argentine political landscape. While the number of women in the professions remained relatively small compared to men, their very existence represented a shift in national employment patterns. The experiences of these new professional women contributed greatly to their political

[466] República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional*, v. 4 (Buenos Aires: L.J Rosso, 1916), 384-93; Mirta Zaida Lobato, "Entre la protección y la exclusión: discurso maternal y protección de la mujer obrera, Argentina 1890-1934," in *La cuestión social en Argentina, 1870-1943*, ed. Juan Surrano (Buenos Aires: La Colmena, 2000), 246; Gil, *La mujer en el trabajo,* 42-3; Marta Henault, "La incorporación de la mujer al industira asalariado," *Todo Es Historia*, no. 183, August 1982, p. 43-53.

perspectives and their desire to assist other working women. These personal experiences included the hostility of men who believed that women simply did not possess the "stoic indifference" necessary to succeed in medicine or other professions.[467] Other leaders of the women's movement, particularly in the National Council of Women, belonged to a different category altogether. Census records reveal a significant number of women that owned property or were independently wealthy.[468] The number of women who owned property outnumbered those involved in the professions, which may help explain the greater initial participation in the conservative National Council of Women compared to Radical or Socialist women's groups. Regardless of background, feminist groups organized around a comparatively small group of women- either wealthy individuals in the case of the National Council of Women or highly educated professionals like the Socialist Women's Center or the Gorriti Center (a Radical group). Working class women did not help organize these groups, yet feminists targeted female workers as the beneficiaries of their actions. In the first decade of the twentieth century, feminist organization and the actions of working women on worker issues shaped the responses of the government to growing class tensions in Argentine society.

The Protection and Participation of Working Women

In the first decade of the twentieth century, worker organization erupted in a series of confrontations with the government and with businesses. In some cases, such as the strikes of 1902 and 1910, the government responded to labor

[467] Pater, "La mujer médica," *Revista del Centro 'Estudiante de Medicina' del Círculo Médico Argentino*, 8:92, April 1909, p. 571.

[468] *Segundo censo de la República Argentina,* p. CXC-CXCIII; *Tercer censo nacional*, p. 391-4.

actions with repressive laws- the Law of Residence in 1902 and the Law of Social Defense in 1910. However, the government also made some concessions to workers by granting legal protections that unions and other social reformers demanded. Protections for female workers topped the list as an important labor reform during this decade.

During the 1890s and 1900s the first reports on factory working conditions appeared in Argentina, sparking concerns for the health and wellbeing of workers. Dr. Emilio Coni and his wife Gabriela Lapperriére de Coni conducted a series of inspection tours of factories and workshops throughout Buenos Aires and environs, and discovered troubling conditions. Match workers, for example, faced severe pulmonary infection, over and above the dangers inherent in handling flammable materials. Other workers in a bag factory risked injury from the machines and lung congestion from the dust and loose materials. That many of the workers in these factories were women or children as young as seven only added to Coni's concerns. They reported that the children they interviewed took pride in their labor but also worried about the poor health of some of their fellow workers. The Coni's both recommended laws to limit the exposure of women and children to unhealthy work conditions, and their arguments helped to shape the workplace regulations that passed in 1907. Some of the Coni's arguments reflected those used for suffrage- they noted that many European nations already had laws to protect female and child laborers, and that Argentina had progressed to the point that the nation required similar legislation. Emilio Coni also used arguments that anti-feminists favored. "The weak constitution of women," Coni declared, "is less resistant than that of men to the pernicious effects of work in factories." Both Coni's called for limits on the workday for women and children, eliminating night shifts for them, and banning women and minors from especially hazardous work. They also favored maternity leave and allowing time for wives

to perform domestic tasks.[469] That the Conis often mentioned female and child labor at the same time suggests that they found employment of either group to be equally dangerous both physically and morally. Such a pairing also suggests a perception of women and children as equally unsuited for modern, industrial labor. The subtext of the Conis' arguments suggests that they would prefer to remove women from the modern workforce altogether. However, the Conis were not the only ones that expressed concern about the conditions of women and child workers. The evolving discourse that followed the reports of the Conis also affected the government's response to working class health and safety issues.

The Socialist Party demonstrated an early interest in female workers both as a focus for action and as potential supporters for socialism. The Socialists had made women's political rights a part of their platform from the beginning, and for many Socialist feminists the Party's political stance logically included rights for women workers as well. Female leaders in the Party, including Laperriére de Coni, made special appeals to women workers, claiming that only the Socialists could bring about a brighter future for women and their families. Articles in the Socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia* (which published many of the reports of the Conis) supported the idea of active female participation in the Party and in allied unions. The editors reminded their readers that "women, like men, work and produce, face excessive work hours, receive inadequate salaries, and receive treatment that does not always reflect decency and morality." Not only that, the

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[469] Emilio Coni, "Higiene industrial: las fábricas de cerillas fosfóricas," *Anales del Departamento Nacional de Higiene*, 1:6, June 1891, p. 357-60; Emilio Coni, "Higiene industrial: la mujer en la industria," *Anales del Departamento Nacional de Higiene*, 1:8, August 1891, p. 477-8; Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "Velado por la salud de las obreras en las fábricas de bolsas," *La Vanguardia*, 9 November 1901; Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "El trabajo de la mujer y del niño en las fábricas," *La Vanguardia*, 24 August 1901; Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "Accidentes del trabajo," *La Vanguardia*, 28 June 1902; Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "Proyecto de ley de trabajo de la mujer y del niño," *La Vanguardia*, 11 June 1904; Lily Sosa de Newton, *Diccionario biográfico de mujeres argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1986), 344-5; Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto, and Diego L. Arguindeguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001), 293-303.

"deeply rooted belief that women should not occupy themselves with politics or economic questions," one editor argued, would risk "discord in the home" and the collapse of the worker's movement itself. The Socialist Party embraced the idea of protective laws for female and child labor as a means to shield them from exploitation. The Socialist drive for workplace protections helped reinforce their claim as the principal defenders of women's rights.[470] However, the Socialist Party was not the only organization that urged the government to provide protection for female and minor employees.

At the turn of the century, the National Council of Women became the first national women's group in Argentina, incorporating a variety of member groups concerned with public health. The Council sought, among other things, to improve the quality of life for women nationwide. While officially distancing itself from politics as such, the Council nevertheless sought to influence Congress on the issue of worker protection. "It is enough to travel to the factories and workshops," one Council report concluded, "where crude labor is met with fatigue, hunger, and death, to feel that piety, mercy, and altruism must move us to offer solace for such pain." The Council (which initially included some Socialists and Radicals) strongly endorsed legislation to protect female workers, particularly those with children. Council president Alvina Van Praet de Sala even urged the members to "use your influence with the deputies or senators among your family and relations so that they will support measures that should be acceptable to all, since everyone has a mother."[471] That Van Praet could make

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[470] "Movimiento económico y gremial en una fábrica de tejidos," *La Vanguardia*, 13 October 1900; Nicolás Repetto, "La manifestación de 1 de Mayo," *La Vanguardia*, 15 April 1902; "En pro de la propaganda entre las mujeres," *La Vanguardia*, 1 September 1900; "Obreras y obreros de la capital," *La Vanguardia*, 17 February 1900; Raquel Messina, "La mujer y el socialismo," *La Vanguardia,* 31 May 1902; "Propaganda a las mujeres" *La Vanguardia*, 28 January 1899; Juan B. Justo, *El socialismo argentino* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1915); "La mujer y las elecciones," *La Vanguardia*, 23 February 1920; Lobato, "Entre la protección y la exclusión…" p. 254.

[471] "Acta del ejecutivo del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 2:7, September 1902, p. 4-5; "Acta de la quinta asamblea del *Consejo Nacional de*

such a request demonstrates how well-connected the Council was. Moreover, that such as conservative organization as the National Council of Women found itself in complete agreement with the Socialist Party on a matter of national legislation demonstrates the extent of the political consensus on workplace regulations.

Even the Anarchists, a group generally opposed to the very idea of government, expressed support for limitations on female and child labor. Anarchists did not usually mention legislation as a solution, but simply supported the idea of limiting female labor to prevent the degradation of future generations. However, some anarchists also encouraged female participation in worker activity, much as socialists did. "The solidarity that has moved women workers to share the risks and the aspirations of the working class," wrote one Anarchist, "has certainly boosted the dignity of and imparted a new energy to" the worker's movement. Others praised the efforts of women in the home and the workplace, honoring the ability of women to "fulfill tasks beyond their weak and exhausted strength" in daily life. The solution to the problems of women workers did not come from reform, however. The Anarchist women's magazine, *La Voz de la Mujer,* described legislation and even labor strikes as useless, calling instead for "frank and open rebellion, without ambiguity or half-measures."[472] Such an uprising failed to materialize, but the underlying sympathy towards working women and frustration over their poor living and working conditions persisted. Anarchists joined political thinkers across the spectrum in their desire to support

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Mujeres, 2:8, December 1902, p. 9; ; "Acta de la quinta asamblea del *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 4:16, December 1904, p. 4.

[472] Felicia Montsey, "La producción y el estado social de la mujer," *El Libertario*, 20 July 1903; "La influencia femenina en el movimiento del proletario," *La Protesta*, 25 November 1904; "Por los niños," *La Protesta*, 30 January 1904; Pepita Gherra, "Nosotras a Vosotras," *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:4, 27 March, 1896 reprinted in María Carmen Feijoó, ed., *La voz de la mujer: periódico comunista anárquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997), 89.

and protect women workers. With the support of activists from all political ideologies, it did not take Congress long to begin considering strong action on workplace protections for women and children.

In 1906, four years after the Residence Law passed in order to curb "dangerous" union activity, Deputy Alfredo Palacios presented a project to protect female and child employees from unsanitary and dangerous conditions. Palacios, the first and at the time only Socialist in Congress, wrote his proposal with the recommendations of Emilio and Garbiela Coni in mind. The law included a sixty-day maternity leave for pregnant women, barred employment of anyone under the age of fourteen, limited working hours to six per day for minors and eight for women, and prohibited employing women or minors in "jobs that are unhealthy, dangerous, [or] that demand sustained physical exertion or concentration." In his opening remarks on the project, Palacios acknowledged that female and child employment was "simply a consequence of modern industrialism" but that there also existed "an absolute uniformity of opinion in respect to the necessity" of his proposed reforms. Women and children had become popular as factory workers because modern technology meant that "muscular strength is no longer indispensable." Women and children could do the job as well as any man but for less money. As a "natural consequence," Palacios argued, "disorder in the home and the weakening of family ties without producing any benefits" to the people affected would follow. Clearly, Palacios worried about the competition for salaries between male and female laborers. However, he expressed his concerns in terms of the danger to family life and the risk to future generations. Palacios observed that many of the women who worked in the factories began their employment at a young age. As a consequence, these young women risked "deforming their bodies, altering their most important life functions, leaving them in poor condition to fulfill the most noble and elevated function of women, that of maternity." While Palacios did not

intend to make it impossible for women to work in factories or any other setting, he clearly wished to make it more difficult for employers to place the same demands on women that they had before then. Palacios' project met with strong approval from the Chamber of Deputies, but went to committee for the usual review and revisions. During that period, business associations made their displeasure known, although feminist groups such as the Socialist Women's Center also sent letters supporting the Palacios project.[473] The final revised version of the bill thus cut down on the protections Palacios had included, helping to guarantee that the subject of workplace protection for female workers would remain unsettled.

When the final draft of the worker protection project appeared before Congress, the Deputies and Senators had modified it to make it less burdensome to businesses. The final version continued to allow businesses to hire women for night shifts and also reduced the number of days of maternity leave from sixty to forty. Furthermore, only the city of Buenos Aires had to follow the strictest regulations, such as maternity leave, limited work hours, and health and hygiene restrictions that barred women and children from working with especially dangerous materials such as explosives. Since the majority of industries operated within Buenos Aires, the law still took in most female and child laborers, but left further reform to the provinces. Speaking on behalf of the review committee, Deputy Pera assured the Chamber that the final product "considered the high interests of justice, the conservative guarantees of social order, and the demands of commerce and industry." Pera went on to assure his colleagues that the proposed reforms served a very important purpose;

> That of taking up once and for all these questions that, though they may seem strange to some of us and though some propose

[473] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesionnes de 1906*, v. 1, p. 345-50, 551, 627, 707-8, and 735-6.

> remedies that are as facile as they are ineffective to solve them- that as they cause discontent, they provoke resistance, they give rise to strikes, they give a pretext for anarchic exaggerations, they come to disturb public order…the truth is that at the root of all social movements there are always just causes that may get distorted in practice, but are always necessary to keep in mind if only to prevent them from re-occurring.

Reform thus prevented revolution. This set the standard for judging any sort of workplace reform- would it diminish labor upheaval and agitation. Other deputies emphasized the benefits to society and the human race as a whole. Deputy Piñero referred to the protection of women and children in the workplace as "a means of communal preservation" that would "prevent the collective capital of life from degenerating, thus assuring its normal evolution and development into the future."[474] The overall emphasis of the comments thus focused on the needs of society as a whole, and not on what particular members of society might prefer.

As industry and commerce developed in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century, politicians and activists confronted a worrying set of circumstances. Concerned for the health of women and children, reformers such as Emilio and Gabriela Coni urged reforms to protect the more vulnerable sectors of the working class. Feminists across the political spectrum took up the cry for reform, urging the government to take action. However, it was not until after the labor disputes of 1902 and the election of a Socialist deputy that Congress heeded these calls and enacted a version of the desired reforms. Political argument combined with practical pressure had succeeded in forcing action from the government. However, these reforms, though championed by so many different groups, by no means settled worker issues. Feminists and other

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[474] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesionnes de 1906*, v. 1, p. 788-803. Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesionnes de 1907*, v. 1, p. 26; Centro Socialista Femenino, *Ley de trabajo de mujeres y niños* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1907) 3-15. The law became final in 1907. Augusto Rocha, ed., *Colección completa de leyes nacionales* (Buenos Aires: La Facultad, 1918), 371-4.

political activists did not agree that the Palacios law went far enough or complained that the law "has been condemned to death by the current government."[475] More to the point, working class women themselves did not find that the laws met their needs. Both before and after the workplace reform of 1907, working class women organized labor unions and community organizations to demand what they wanted and not just what the government was willing to give to them.

Working Women in Labor Unions and Associations

As working class women began to occupy larger shares of the labor force in specific industries, the issue of unionization also grew in importance. If, as some of the commentators of the day asserted, businesses preferred female laborers because they were cheaper and more docile than male workers, then one would not expect labor organization among women. However, not only did women participate in some of the same unions as their male counterparts, but they also created their own labor organizations separate from the male-dominated labor movement. These women's unions engaged in all of the traditional union activities, including strikes and work stoppages. Even unemployed women or housewives of working class men organized in support of their working relatives and in favor of the needs of the community. Social reformers, including the leaders of feminist organizations, usually described working class women as victims and selfless martyrs in need of protection. While lower-class women did not live or work in ideal circumstances, their ability to organize for their own interests demonstrates that they were far from helpless,

[475] "El trabajo de las mujeres y los niños: la inspección oficial contra la ley," *La Vanguardia,* 8 October 1910.

and both feminists and union leaders sought to mobilize working class women for their own ends.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the socialists appealed to women to support their cause both in politics and within the workers movement. As a result, the first meetings of the national labor organizations connected to the Socialist Party included female representation. The1903 congress of the Unión General de Trabajo (General Labor Union) included two organizations created by and for female workers- the Uníon Gremial Femenino (Female Workers Union) and the Obreras en General del Rosario (The General Women Workers of Rosario). The Female Workers Union proved especially vocal during the congress. The union invited Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, the renowned hygienist who had recently joined the Socialist Party and had become an official health inspector in the city of Buenos Aires. Laperriére addressed the congress, urging them to support her ideas on proper hygiene in the workplace and protection of female and child laborers. The Labor Confederation did resolve to call for "work to conform to the demands of hygiene" and even to "defend the work of women in the sense that for equal work she be compensated at the same rate as male workers." The Confederation outlined a protection law that contained all of the previsions that Palacios included in his project three years later. Thus, women's issues including the workplace protections that Congress approved in 1907 did form part of the workers movement agenda. However, female representation in national organizations remained small- the congress barely discussed the promotion of female integration into unions.[476] Nevertheless, women's labor organizations proved that they could make themselves heard, although they continued to operate on the fringes of the male labor movement. Male neglect

[476] *Congreso Obrero Gremial convocado por el 'Comité de Propaganda Gremial' Marzo de 1903*, p. 1-2, 24-5, and 44-8. The Socialist Women's Center supported Laperriére's efforts and the palacios law- see Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, "El movimiento socialista femenino en la República Argentina," *Almanaque de Trabajo*, 1918, p. 142-3.

(or hostility) combined with infighting resulted in a lack of coordination among female workers.

One of the first and only attempts to unify women workers in a single entity was the Female Workers Union. This Union, organized in 1903, had successfully advocated for the protection of female and child laborers at the General Labor Union Congress that same year. The Union attempted to bring together female working class organizations in much the same way that the National Council of Women tried to lead women's charities and organizations. Female strike activity in the fifteen years prior to the Union's creation had met with limited success but also encouragement from the Socialist and Anarchist press. For example, when the women workers of a sandal factory in Buenos Aires struck for higher wages and shorter hours, the editors of *La Vanguardia* detailed the worker's demands and asked readers to contribute money to their union. The Anarchist paper *La Protesta* made similar appeals during a strike of male and female textile workers, highlighting the contributions and "enthusiasm" of both sexes. These writers clearly supported the notion of female participation in worker's organizations. Indeed, some writers expressed frustration that there were not more women involved in labor activity and worried that those who did participate needed more "discipline" and "preparation for the struggle." The Female Workers Union sought to fill the gaps in female labor union activism. However, the Union, which included both Anarchists and Socialists, eventually divided, as did the two constituent ideological groups. As a result, by 1906- at the same time the Palacios project began to make its way through Congress- the Women's Union ceased to exist.[477] This brief experiment in a united women's worker movement,

[477] "Las mujeres en acción: una huelga simpática," *La Vanguardia*, 3 August 1901; "Las condiciones del trabajo: tejedores," *La Vanguardia*, 12 April 1902; "La huelga de tejedores en Villa Crespo," *La Protesta*, 14 November 1903; "Acción femenina," *La Protesta*, 8 December 1904; "Acción femenina," *La Protesta*, 10 December 1904; "Acción femenina," *La Protesta*, 18 December 1904; Carmen Baldovino, "Unión Gremial Femenino," *La Protesta*, 6 December 1904;

though frustrating, had nevertheless served to focus attention on women's workplace issues. Female unions continued to organize in particular industries, and women workers continued to participate in unions with members of both sexes. Working class women also found opportunities to make their concerns heard through other types of organization, particularly in efforts to address crucial problems in worker housing.

As industry and commercial development surged at the turn of the century, so too did the populations in the urban centers. The housing crunch that resulted proved a major concern both to those who studied public health and the workers themselves. The former group worried about the effect of poorly constructed neighborhoods on the spread of disease and on the "modest promiscuity" of the cramped apartments. However, the actual residents of working class neighborhoods worried more about the exorbitant costs of rent. While high demand for housing inevitably made the cost of living expensive, those faced with these costs attempted to organize in order to prevent what they saw as ruthless profiteering. In 1906, the General Labor Union, the Socialist Party, and the Anarchist Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (Argentine Regional Workers' Federation) successfully pooled their resources to create a Renter's League. The League served as a means to protest and reduce high rents throughout the major cities, especially Buenos Aires. In 1907, the League faced its first serious test. Following a rise in property taxes, landlords in Buenos Aires responded with an increase in rent prices in excess of the tax hike. This prompted a rent strike across the city that eventually spread to other urban centers. The strikers demanded a rent reduction of thirty percent, arguing that the current prices "threaten the needs of the home" for families everywhere. The strike grew to include 2,000 *conventillos*, and provoked sympathetic responses

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"Movimiento obrero: Unión Gremial Femenino," *La Protesta*, 17 January 1905; Lobato, "Entre la protección y la exclusión…" 247-53; Deleis et.al, *Mujeres de la política argentina*, 296-8.

from the national press. Landlords initially scrambled to respond with their own organization, but nevertheless began to settle with their renters on an individual basis.[478] The League had made a strong showing in its early actions.

As the rent strike grew, women's participation on behalf of the renters proved essential. The Anarchist press reported several "very amusing scenes" that highlighted the defiance women showed toward the landlords. In one such instance, a group of women witnessed a gang of hired thugs attacking one of the young men of the neighborhood. The women came to the young man's rescue, subduing his attackers. Before letting them go, the women forced the thugs to remove their pants, forcing them to depart the neighborhood in this manner. Eventually, the block captain of the league got the women to return the garments, but not before the rest of the neighborhood had gotten a good look at the attacker's humiliation. The report ended with the exclamation "good for the women!" and continued to record similar incidents over the course of the strike, always with a note of approval.[479] Over and above the "traditional" support of families, women served as active participants in the strike, defending their families and neighbors from the counterattacks of the landlords.

The rent strike ended late in 1907 with uncertain results. While the landlords had acquiesced to most of the demands of the renters, their compliance with the ensuing agreements remained spotty. The mainstream press took the landlords to task for failing to uphold their end of the bargains, and

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[478] "Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "El trabajo de la mujer y del niño en las fábricas," *La Vanguardia*, 24 August 1901; Liga contra las alquileres é impuestos," *La Protesta*, 9 November 1906; "Inquilinos en huelga," *La Protesta*, 31 August 1907; "La huelga de inquilinos: crónica del movimiento," *La Protesta*, 4 October 1907; "La gran huelga de inquilinos," *La Protesta*, 16 October 1907; "La huelga de inquilinos," *La Nación*, 22 November 1907; Hobart Spalding, *La clase trabajadora argentina: documentos para su historia* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1970), 449-54; Héctor Recalde, "La vivienda popular en Buenos Aires, 1870-1930," *Todo Es Historia*, 27:320, March 1994, p. 34-6.

[479] "La gran huelga de inquilinos," *La Protesta,* 12 October 1907; "La gran huelga de inquilinos," *La Protesta,* 12 November 1907.

the Renters League attempted to renew the strike. However, the energy of the renters had exhausted itself, and within a few months of the end of the strike the old prices had returned.[480] While the renters strike failed in its goals in the long run, its initial success provided another proof of the valuable and active role that women could play in working class organization. The presence of women in unions and other working class groups would continue to prove valuable. However, after the first decade of the twentieth century a strong reaction set in against the presence of women in the workforce as the debate over feminism itself intensified.

The Reaction to Working Women in the 1910s

In the 1910s, the stance of unions and leftist parties towards women workers began to shift. In the previous two decades, worker organizations had officially endorsed the active participation of female laborers within their ranks. Furthermore, both unions and left-wing political parties had strongly supported workplace protection for women and child laborers. To be sure, Conservative groups such as the National Council of Women had also supported workplace legislation, but it was the Socialist Deputy Alfredo Palacios who had actually authored the original legislation to protect female workers. Male-dominated unions had an additional motive behind their support of regulations limiting working hours for female labor and providing facilities for nursing mothers. Such rules for the employment of women might make business owners less likely to hire females, thereby opening more jobs for men. Since the census following the 1907 workplace law shows that the total number of male employees in industry had risen relative to female workers, it is possible that the law had this effect,

[480] "La huelga de inquilinos," *La Nación*, 4 December 1907; "A la Federación de Inquilinos," *La Protesta*, 11 January 1908.

regardless of intent.[481] However, beginning in 1910 new problems with the female workforce began to emerge. Feminists who tracked the enforcement of the workplace protection laws expressed serious concerns that businesses and the government failed to uphold this important reform. Consequently, feminists continued to call for stronger workplace regulations and for stricter enforcement of existing laws. Furthermore, feminists noted the continued disparities in wages at all employment levels. Feminist leaders tended to focus on gaps in pay in professional employment, particularly in education, by far the largest white-collar job for women in Argentina. Labor unions with strong female membership, meanwhile, continued to agitate for better wages for their members, with varied results. However, at the same time a strong reaction against any female employment began to set in during the 1910s and 20s, both in and outside of the workers movement. Hostility towards women laborers and towards their participation in unions limited their effectiveness. However, the very desire to limit female workers may have facilitated the expansion of workplace protections in the mid-1920s, again as a way to limit the desire of industrialists to hire female employees. In any case, all of those concerned with female labor continued to justify their actions in terms of the betterment of society as a whole, regardless of their own particular interests.

In the aftermath of the Palacios workplace reforms of 1907, Socialist feminists that took on the task of inspecting businesses for compliance found a distressing picture. Following the death of Gabriela Laperriére de Coni in 1907, Socialist leaders, most notably Carolina Muzzilli, took over as labor inspectors, visiting factories and investigating the circumstances of female and child labor with respect to the laws. These inspectors catalogued violations of the workplace regulations, citing factories for giving women or minors overly long shifts or failing

[481] República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional,* v. 4, p. 389.

to permit them regular breaks. Part of the problem, according to Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, was that the 1907 laws contained loopholes. For example, the law "permitted" employers of mothers to nurse their babies for fifteen minutes every two hours, but did not specifically require them to do so, nor did the law oblige employers to provide a room for nursing. As a result, Chertcoff reported that mothers "eight days after giving birth return to work and leave their children without natural sustenance for over four hours" to the detriment of the child's health. The inspectors petitioned Congress to increase the number of official investigators in the workplace in order to enforce the law more effectively. In addition, Carolina Muzzilli, writing on behalf of both Radical and Socialist feminist groups, called for on-site day care facilities in factories, stricter hygiene standards, and a minimum wage, all in the name of improving family health. Feminist inspectors reinforced their observations with medical reports supporting the conclusion that stricter workplace regulations would indeed support public health.[482] While feminist leaders did not ignore the need for better pay, the focus on stricter workplace regulations became their primary focus for the next two decades.

While the conditions of the workplace certainly concerned working class women, unions continued to emphasize the more basic demands of salaries. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, women joined established

[482] "Por la inspección del trabajo," *La Vanguardia*, 9 May 1910; "Trabajo de las mujeres y de los niños," *La Vanguardia*, 18 August 1910; "Trabajo de las mujeres y de los niños," *La Vanguardia*, 26 August 1910; Fenia Chertcoff de Repetto, "El trabajo de las mujeres y los niños," *La Vanguardia*, 21 September 1910; "El trabajo de las mujeres y los niños: la inspección oficial contra la ley," *La Vanguardia,* 8 October 1910; "Liga para los derechos de la mujer y del niño," *Unión y Labor*, 3:28, 21 January 1912, p. 30-1; "Liga para los derechos de la mujer y del niño," *Unión y Labor*, 3:30, 30 March 1912, p. 30-1; Carolina Muzzilli, "El trabajo femenino," *Boletín Mensual del Museo Social Argentino*, 2:15, 1913, 71-90; "Enrique del Valle Iberlucea, "El trabajo a domicilio," *La Vanguardia*, 26 July 1913; Enrique Dickmann, *Jornada legal de trabajo y semana inglesa* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1914), 5-19; Alicia B. de Guillot in *Primer congreso femenino internacional de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: A. Ceppi, 1911), 281; "Homenaje a Carolina Muzzilli," *Humanidad Nueva*, 11:1-2, 1918, p. 21; Deleis et. al., *Las mujeres de la política Arengitna*, 311; Sosa de Newton, *Dicconario biográfico*, 436.

unions, particularly in sectors (such as domestic service) in which they formed a large part of the workforce. Pay increases represented the most popular demand of women's unions, as was true of male-dominated unions. Women workers also demanded shorter working hours which, both before and after the 1907 law passed, was a high priority that they shared with feminist leaders. These persistent demands of female workers demonstrated their own priorities, which did not always match those of feminist reformers. Nor did female workers find themselves in complete alignment with the interests of male workers. While Socialist and Anarchist newspapers celebrated the collaboration of men and women in unions, those same newspapers reported on mistakes that those workers made. The Anarchist paper *La Protesta*, for example, noted with exasperation that the female workers of a match factory had agreed to a labor arbitration, a move that the editors asserted never worked to the benefit of the strikers. More disturbingly, *La Protesta* reported cases of women being used as scabs- laborers hired during a strike in order to push out unionized workers.[483] Therefore, the enthusiastic tones that had colored earlier commentary on female workers began to diminish as the possibility that women workers might hinder or even counter the progress of the worker's movement became apparent.

While the fortunes of working women became increasingly dubious, professional women also faced difficulties in their jobs. The presence of women in white-collar professions had heralded the arrival of feminism itself. Many of

[483] "Huelga general de tejedores," *La Protesta*, 18 November 1904; "Movimiento obrero, heulgas del día, el gremio de tejedores," *La Protesta*, 18 November 1904; "El paro de los tejedores," *La Protesta*, 28 February 1908; "Movimiento obrero: Liga Internacional de Domésticos," *La Protesta*, 9 December 1904; "Movimiento obrero: cigareros," *La Protesta*, 10 December 1904; "Movimiento obrero: planchadoras, planchadores, y anexos," *La Protesta*, 22 September 1906; "Sociedades gremialses," *La Vanguardia*; 21 April 1907; "Acción femenina," *La Protesta*, 10 December 1904; Horacio B. Rossi, "A las mujeres," *La Protesta*, 2 August 1906; "La mujer obrera en las luchas del trabajo," *La Protesta*, 24 December 1906; "La mujer obrera en las luchas del trabajo," *La Protesta*, 24 July 1906; "Movimiento obrero: huelga de fosforeros," *La Protesta*, 26 September 1906; "Agitación gremial," *La Vanguardia*, 8 May 1910; "Generalización de la huelga: toman parte en la lucha numerosas mujeres," *La Vanguardia*, 5 May 1910.

the first feminist leaders were also among the first female physicians- such as Cecilia Grierson, the very first Argentine woman doctor and co-founder of the National Council of Women. However, education remained the most popular field by far for women with advanced degrees throughout the first half of the twentieth century. By one estimate, by 1903 women constituted over 75% of the primary school teachers in the city of Buenos Aires. Thus, teacher associations held particular importance for feminists that wanted to promote the interests of professional women. However, such associations were slow in developing despite the increasing number of women teachers, a fact that surprised and dismayed feminists. Nevertheless, teachers and feminists alike reacted to unfair treatment. For example, in 1912 an official of the National Education Council proposed raising the salaries of male teachers while leaving the pay of female teachers alone. The official justified this a way to attract more men to teaching and because "the teaching of female instructors is only beneficial in the lower grades" whereas men performed better as teachers at higher levels.[484] Teachers and feminists alike reacted with outrage, and the Council abandoned the idea. Despite a growing presence in the white-collar world, middle class women had to struggle for their benefits just as working class women did.

While women continued to struggle for their rights in the workplace, they also had to answer critics who believed women should not do any work outside of the home. Though critics tended to focus on women who entered "male" fields such as industry or medicine (as opposed to "feminine" occupations such as domestic service or education) their arguments usually encompassed all paid work outside the home. Those that wished to keep women out of the workplace

[484] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Liga Nacional de Maestras," *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:8, August 1910, p. 391; "Asociación Pro-maestros," *El Diario*, 28 May 1913; Asociación de Maestros de la Provincia, *Carta orgánica* (San Juan: n.p., 1914); Emilia M. Salza, "La acción educadora de la mujer en la Argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 3:12, December 1903, p. 21-2;"Notas de educación," *Unión y Labor*, 3:32, May 1912, p. 2.

included leftists as well as conservatives, who used language that resonated with socialists:

> Let us consider the principal axis, the true base of the home- the mother. In the dominant economic system, she must work along with the father. The factory, the workshop, and domestic service are all consuming forces that tear thousands of mothers away from the home and the care of their children, brutally hurling them into the vortex of capitalist production, leaving the family space vacant and paralyzing the only mechanism that a mother should operate: that which gives life and warmth to the home. Homes without mothers are not homes, which is what we have in our society organized as it is, instead they are simple and miserable nocturnal shelters beneath the roofs of which huddle beings utterly separated from moral order.

Feminists responded to the charge that working women threatened home life in much the same way they defended political participation for women. Feminists argued that working outside of the home not only did not harm the family, but could be a means for strengthening it. Alicia Moreau de Justo asserted that nothing prevented a woman from being a good mother and holding a job. Indeed, a job meant a woman could "secure an honorable and independent life, if the circumstances of life demand it of her." Gabriela Laperriére de Coni concurred with Moreau's sentiments, adding that society as a whole needlessly limited itself if it excluded women from any source of gainful employment. Other feminists acknowledged that women would always be mothers first, and so long as working mothers continued to make the family their first priority no harm would come from women working outside of the home.[485] Nevertheless, the concern that working mothers represented a threat to society persisted well beyond the

[485] Julio del Romero, "Nuestros hijos," *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:1, February 1910, p. 53-4; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Femenismo é intelectualismo," *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:1, February 1910, p. 26-7; Gabriela Laperriére de Coni, "La mujer médica," *La Vanguardia,* 25 June 1904; Merceded Rujato Crespo in Miguel J. Font, ed., *La mujer: encuesta feminista argentina* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1921?), 179.

1910s, influencing every decision unions and the government made regarding female labor.

In order to make the case that feminist goals of greater women's liberty facilitated the betterment of society, Socialist women's rights leaders sought to unite the women's right movement with the labor movement. "The feminine sex," wrote Carolina Muzzilli, "is seriously interested in the emancipation of the proletariat." In order to achieve that emancipation, Muzzilli argued that working class women required not only distance from the "unhealthy factory" but also "the cultivation of their minds so that the future of the proletariat will reveal itself to them, allowing them to take part in class struggle." If feminists did not "bring [their] wisdom to the clouded intelligence of the woman in the workshop or factory" then feminism "will remain enclosed in a tight circle" without benefiting anyone. Socialist feminists continued to advance their ideology of the working woman, and this attitude guided the activities of the Socialist Women's Center and related organizations. One such entity, the Ateneo Popular, provided workers with educational experiences such as trips to museums or the countryside. Alicia Moreau de Justo, an active participant in the Ateneo's events, reported that male and female workers alike displayed a lively interest in intellectual development and responded well to the Party's message. However, some Socialist feminists made the Party's attitude towards workplace reform for women unclear. Speaking at the 1910 International Women's Congress, Juana María Begino asserted that the success of socialism would "remove women from the harsh work of the factory, permanently placing them in their homes, surrounding her with the sweet sound of her children singing songs of infinite love!"[486] While some socialists defended the right of women to work outside the

[486] Carolina Muzzilli, "Emancipacón de la mujer," *La Vanguardia*, 26 September 1910; Carmen Scarlatti de Pandolfini, "La obra del 'Ateno Popular,'" *Humanidad Nueva*, 1912, p. 129-30; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "En busca de la verdad," *Humanidad Nueva,* 1912, p. 263-4; Juana Maria Begino in *Primer congreso femenino*, 212-3.

home, others clearly sought a return to an ill-defined past in which women devoted themselves utterly to the care of children and the home. Such a mixed message surely confused even those working class women who adhered to the Socialists philosophy. That unions also sent mixed messages added to the confusion and difficulties of female laborers.

At the turn of the century, unions had officially encouraged female participation, yet statements began to appear in the 1910s that revealed the underlying tension within male-dominated unions. Earlier reports in Socialist and Anarchist newspapers had presented a mixed image of women in labor activities that was sometimes positive, sometimes condescending, and sometimes worrisome. In the 1910's reports in the mainstream press demonstrated a hostile attitude that pervaded union membership. An article in *La Prensa* discussed the significant presence of women in industry, drawing attention to "the growing number of mothers who abandon their homes every day in total disregard of their duties there in order to gather at the workplace in pursuit of a reduced salary." The article expressed concerns regarding the impact of female work on male laborers over and above the danger empty homes posed to the "wellbeing and progress" of the nation. "The growing employment of women contributes to the decline of salaries," the author wrote, "because women are able, as a result of increased mechanization, to complete the same tasks as men while receiving lesser remuneration. It is logical for industry to give women preference while purely economic concepts prevail." Female work thus presented a threat to the financial wellbeing of the average male worker as well as the moral health of the nation. Elvira López, an active feminist leader since the early days of the National Council of Women, recognized the power of the salary argument and sought to repudiate it. "Feminists," she wrote, "advise putting into practice the socialist slogan 'equal pay for equal work.'" In addition, López reassured her

readers that growing societies always produced more jobs, and those who lost a job today could find one tomorrow.[487] López's arguments provided a sound basis for supporting equal pay- apart from the fairness of the idea, her argument implicitly assumed that businesses would prefer male workers if the pay scales for men and women were equal (a theory that was never put to the test). Nevertheless, the suspicion that female workers would somehow steal jobs from men remained a persistent problem for feminists and female union activists.

The 1910s proved to be a transitional period for feminism as a political and labor movement. While feminists became increasingly fragmented by political ideology, so did opinions on the presence of women in the workplace become fragmented. While commentators of the day continued to portray female workers as victims of the modern economy, society seemed to be increasingly polarized over whether or not women should be allowed to work outside the home at all. Feminists, always in support of the idea that the maternal role should come first for women, split over the role paid work should play in the lives of women. Some, such as the most prominent Socialist feminists, argued that a job or even a professional career could fit well with a woman's domestic responsibilities. However, other feminists, including some socialists, dreamed of a world in which women would be free from work outside the home- or at least, not be in a position to compete with male laborers. Little if anything was said regarding male duties in the home. Regardless of these debates, women continued to enter the workforce either out of necessity or their own personal desires. In the 1920s, shortly before the campaign for Civil Code reform reached its successful conclusion, a fresh attempt at workplace regulations made its way through Congress. This new phase of the discussion over women in the workplace revealed that whatever the moral qualms individuals might have on the

[487] "Mujeres en las fábricas," *La Prensa*, 31 may 1918; Elvira López in Font, *La mujer*, 134-5.

subject, the real issue was not whether women would work, but rather under what circumstances would they work.

The Second Workplace Reform

Following the violence of the *semana trágica* of 1919, workplace legislation once again took center stage in Argentine political discourse. Though feminists had continually argued for stricter codes and enforcement of workplace regulations, the need to monitor workers and discourage new upheaval prompted the Yrigoyen and Alvear governments to view the proposed regulations in a more favorable light. Three years before the Civil Code Reform of 1926, a series of new projects came before Congress designed to strengthen and expand the original Palacios law that had passed in 1907. Palacios himself, now a Senator, pushed this new law with the aid of his socialist colleagues in the two houses, and this time the regulations passed un-amended. The clauses of the new law satisfied the demands of the feminists, and contributed to the overall sense that all of the demands of the women's rights movement would soon be met. However, workers, both male and female, continued to take issue with their working and living conditions, making new demands on the government and the women's movement. When the coup of 1930 occurred, both the existing victories of workplace protection and the new demands of the workers were suddenly thrown into doubt.

The aftermath of the violence of 1919 saw a resurgence of both feminist demands for political rights and for reforms for the working class, and some female activists made a connection between the two issues. One feminist wrote that:

> While the weaker sex lacks a voice to defend its aspirations, [or] to dictate impartial fair laws that benefit them, [or] to erase from the code the humiliating words that place married women in the same

> category as children and the insane, the stronger sex will do absolutely nothing to protect them…I would like for men to make life easier for their companions and bring them freedom and equality so they will not have to look for them. But unfortunately it will not be so.

Political rights for women would thus secure true workplace protection and Civil Code reform. Other feminists emphasized the contradictory nature of women's place in modern society. On the one hand, "the State [and] society consider women too be delicate and fragile" yet women had long engaged in the "rough tasks of the field, the workshop, the factory" without fail. This being the case, it made no sense to have laws that treated women as incapable of doing anything outside of the home.[488] These feminist arguments put workplace protections in a new light. Rather than protecting women and families from the ill-effects of work, new legislation should facilitate women's efforts and allow them to do their jobs well.

Working class women also made their voices heard following the *semana trágica*, placing further urgency on the need for workplace reform. These strikes often aroused the sympathy of the press, as in the case of the telephone workers strike of 1919. The women of the telephone company demanded shorter hours and increased pay. After attending a meeting of the phone workers union, one reporter described the efforts of the women involved as "a work of true feminism and beneficial to the health of these future mothers," and urged public support for the strike. A teacher strike in Santa Fe prompted similar positive responses. When the union successfully obtained equitable wages for female instructors, the press praised the teacher's success and denounced the "fallacious traditionalism" that valued male work more than female. Women workers also took their case directly to the public. In an open letter to Hipólito Yrigoyen, a

[488] Luisa Israel de Portela in Font, *La mujer,* 121; Isabel Crews in Font, *La mujer,* 145-6.

working class mother took the president to task for his handling of worker issues after 1919:

> In the name of all the poor little Argentine children who are now without fathers and in the name of all the destitute mothers that also are now without spouses, I address you. How is it possible, Mister President, that I could remain silent, as you do, upon seeing the bitter tragedy that the poor workers experience after so many disappointments, so many struggles, and so much effort spent organizing themselves in order to work together to provide bread for their children and family in this time of high prices? What do you think, Mister President, these men must be thinking when they see you depriving them of their liberty and locking them in dark dungeons? I think, Mister President, that the millions of the capitalists are worth as much as the life of a worker.

Working class women clearly had something to say about the circumstances of their lives, thought they did not always have the opportunity to express it so clearly.[489] A positive response to their demands contributed to the broader dialogue that led to new workplace regulations.

Over the next few years, feminist arguments once again entered the mainstream press as support for new workplace reforms increased. The articles that appeared in the major newspapers at the time of the workplace regulation law's reform in 1924 reflected the desire to make the regulations more uniform and inclusive. An editorial in *La Prensa* urged Congress to impose the same regulations on all of Argentina, and not just the city of Buenos Aires as the 1907 law did. "It has been demonstrated," the editors wrote, "that the employment of women and children has the same characteristics, and in many cases the same consequences, in the capital and in the interior." The editors also noted that many provincial legislatures had implemented the Buenos Aires-specific provisions of the 1907 law in their own regions. The press also supported an

[489] "Movimiento femenino: huelgas, asambleas, y prclamaciones," *El Diario*, 17 March 1919; "La huelga telefonista," *El Diario*, 18 March 1919; "La huelga de maestros: continúa como el primer día," *Cuasimodo*, 2:19, June 1921; "La voz de las madres," *La Vanguardia*, 11 June 1921.

increase in maternity leave and placing stricter limits on female and child labor in dangerous or unhygienic industries. However, the press also cautioned against restricting working hours too much out of fear for the economic consequences to workers and industry alike.[490] Nevertheless, the media's support for new workplace reform once again signaled the willingness of the government to take a hand in monitoring and enhancing workplace regulations.

Throughout the 1910s and early 1920s, various members of Congress presented projects to expand the existing workplace regulations for women and children, building on the arguments that feminists and reformers outside of the government had made. Legislators objected to the "minimal advantages" that the 1907 law gave workers, the "lack of a true means of application" of the regulations, and the limited geographical scope of the law, which applied almost exclusively to the city of Buenos Aires alone. The projects therefore outlined the limitations on female and child labor in far greater detail. For example, the proposals listed several of the occupations considered to be "manifestly detrimental to health" or prone to serious accidents, such as the manufacture of matches, glass, alcohol, explosives, or paint. These projects also detailed the work schedule of women and minors, limiting the total number of labor hours a week and specifying what time of day they could be employed. Work breaks also factored into these proposals, requiring businesses to provide chairs for their female and under-aged employees. Finally, the projects gave inspectors greater liberty to investigate businesses "in any location and at any time that they have reason to believe that there are women or minors employed at the moment," and prescribed a series of penalties that would increase with each violation.[491]

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[490] "Extensión de las leyes obreras," *La Prensa*, 6 October 1924; "Nueva ley de trabajo de mujeres y niños," *La Prensa,* 24 October 1924.

[491] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1916*, v. 2, p. 1042-48; *Diario de sesiones de 1917*, v. 1, p. 240-1; *Diario de sesiones*, v. 2, p. 8-18; *Diario de sesiones de 1921*, v. 1, p. 352-3.

However, these new projects did not receive ready support from the majority of Deputies. The authors of the projects tended to be from Buenos Aires, where the existing labor codes already applied to the fullest extent. Other members of Congress were not eager to extend the power of the labor inspectors in their own provinces. However, as more provincial legislatures created such regulations in their own territories, the arguments in favor of a stronger national law gained in strength.

In 1922, support for a stronger workplace code at last became strong enough for Congress to give it serious consideration. In that year a commission studied the proposals and came back with a project that defined working hours and acceptable industries for female and child labor for the entire nation, but left out the sections on regular breaks and the use of chairs. However, the new project also extended maternity leaves for women and prevented employers from firing women simply for becoming pregnant. Socialist Augusto Bunge explained to his colleagues that as men they had a special duty regarding women:

> [We] should consider that women, because they are the weaker half in our country, the half displaced from the most fundamental rights such as those of a citizen and civil rights, and as a consequence of this subordinate situation the law has placed them in men that have acquired an awareness of the role women have played in civilization ought to protect them and at the same time be aware that they cannot bear the inferior condition that tradition ascribes to them.

In other words, unless and until women obtained the ability to defend their own interests, men would have to do it for them. Other deputies argued that the factory should be an extension of the home in the sense of providing an atmosphere conducive to the positive development of children. Once again, the deputies emphasized the interests of family life in their justifications for this law, which passed with amendments that strengthened its provisions. The benefits

for women workers did not include equal pay. But restricted working hours, a goal of feminists and unions alike, was now a reality. Over the next two decades, congressmen continued to introduce legislation designed to enhance the provisions of this law, enacted in 1924, with some success. One of these later additions to the 1924 law expanded maternity leave to seventy days and another excepted women working in agriculture, domestic service and their own family enterprises from the limits on working hours (entertainment workers were already excepted). These additions notwithstanding, the new law still contained loopholes. For example, for every business with 100 or more female employees, the managers had to provide a room for mothers to nurse their children. As an article in *La Prensa* pointed out, this meant that an employer with 99 female workers could easily avoid such an obligation.[492] Refinement and expansion of workplace regulations in order to better protect women would never disappear entirely as possibility. However, enforcement or work laws became the most critical issue, especially after the coup of 1930, when far less worker-friendly governments seized power.

The 1920s proved to be a period conducive both the feminist and worker issues. Laws revising the Civil Code, workplace regulations, and voting rights in San Juan and other provinces all came into being at this time. While politicians justified such laws as necessary for the health and wellbeing of society, the women affected by these laws saw them as simple, practical necessities. Though many commentators remained wary of the presence of women in the workplace, they could not reverse what had become a fact of modern life. Women would work out of economic necessity. Governments could only shape

[492] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1918*, v. 1, p. 551-62 and 708-54; *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v.2, p. 524-8 and 562-5; *Diario de Sesiones de 1926*, v. 4, p. 621-4; *Diario de Sesiones de 1932*, v. 5, p. 347-8; *Diario de Sesiones de 1933*, v. 2, p. 737-9; *Diario de Sesiones de 1934*, v. 5, p. 611-13; *Diario de Sesiones de 1936*, v. 2, p. 720; *Diario de Sesiones de 1939*, v. 1, p. 279-80; Augusto Rocha, ed., *Colección completa de leyes nacionales* (Buenos Aires: La Facultad, 1926), 286-91.

the circumstance under which that work took place, making it easier or more difficult for the workers. In the period of the Infamous Decade, the government backed off the comparatively labor-friendly stance of the previous administration.

Women Workers in the 1930s and 1940s

Following the coup of September 1930, Argentina entered a period of political reaction as the conservative forces that the Radical party had displaced in 1916 returned. In the years that followed, the right-wing orientation of the administration combined with the economic depression of the 1930s placed organized labor in a difficult situation. Unions sought to defend their rights in much the same way that feminists sought to prevent the roll-back of previously achieved gains. For unions, this meant that previous concerns regarding the role of women in the labor movement again became a matter of urgent consideration. Women continued to play an important role in the economy- indeed, according to some reports their numbers were on the rise in commerce and industry. However, the idea that women competed with men for jobs and thus caused wages to drop took on new life during the difficult economic times. As a result, male workers continued to exclude women from full participation in the labor movement, although officially they supported the demands of women workers. Similarly, new proposals for legislation favorable to female workers appeared throughout the 1930s. However, just as women's suffrage legislation stalled in Congress, so did efforts to improve the lot of the majority of female workers.

The onset of the Great Depression sent shock waves through the workforce that prompted major demographic shifts. In the first years of the 1930s, unemployment surged for men and women alike, making the earlier union demands for higher wages and shorter hours irrelevant. Declines in production and the repressive tactics of the administration of General José Uriburu (1930-2)

forced organized labor into a defensive stance as workers sought to retain their positions. However, by 1934 the economy began to recover and employment numbers rose steadily. This new economic surge accelerated the growth of urban centers, especially Buenos Aires. One of the contributing factors to this growth was the mass migration of women from the rural interior of the country to the cities in search of work. This migration prompted serious concerns among feminists and social reformers concerned with the living and working conditions of the working class.[493] Feminist organizations stepped up the vocational training programs that they had always offered while taking steps to curb the less savory forms of female employment available in the cities. Meanwhile, unions once again organized drives to improve salaries and working conditions. As labor leaders revived their movement, the issue of female participation once again became an issue for debate. As a result, women labor activists had a fresh opportunity to attempt to achieve their goals.

Throughout the 1930s, feminists and social reformers denounced the poor working conditions of women in industry and business. Alicia Moreau de Justo attributed poor treatment of female labor to the pervasive "social inferiority" of women. After all, "why should the employer," she wrote, "be more generous than the rest of the country that has degraded [women's] social and political condition?" Other feminists focused on the economic strategies of producers and retailers as the culprits for low wages and poor conditions. "Would it not be more humane," wrote one feminist, "for the factories and the big stores to pay a few cents a day more to their workers, even though we would no longer see those colossal reduction sales?" These feminists used language derived from the earliest reports of Emilio and Gabriela Coni, urging employers to take better care

[493] Carlos Abeijón and Jorge Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina antes y después de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Cuartomundo, 1975), 75; Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 117-20.

of “the little worker that tomorrow may be a mother” so that she would not have “weak children.” These feminists often reported on the unsanitary or dangerous conditions that women still faced in the workplace and sought to expose employers who violated workplace regulations.[494] However, the reactionary political tone of the 1930s made government action on these violations even less likely than beforehand. Feminists added this neglect of the welfare of women workers to the catalogue of complaints lodged against the administrations of the Infamous Decade.

Although conditions for women in the workplace remained poor throughout the 1930s, feminists did see some positive changes within the growing female labor force. At first, feminists in the 1930s expressed disappointment that working women “have resigned themselves to the dark, spiritual life, without any disquiet or aspirations, and if at times they have felt the spark of silent rebellion in their souls, they learned to hide and smother it before it could disturb the sweet tranquility of their lives.” Frustration at the apparent lack of working class participation in the feminist movement had tinged discussions of women’s rights before, but in the 1930s feminists also saw signs of hope. Feminists had long argued that the presence of women in the workplace made female political rights possible (by demonstrating that women could function capably outside of the home) and necessary (as a defense against exploitation). Feminists had also argued that women would not obtain suffrage and other rights until “they are prepared to take them.” This interpretation meant that women had the ability and the right to make their rights as workers and citizens real, but they had to make those rights a reality themselves. Towards the end of the decade some feminists observed that while working class women had “tolerated” their exploitation “with

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[494] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *El socialismo y la mujer* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1933), 19-20; “¿Quienes son las victimas de las liquidaciones?” *Vida Femenina*, 3:24, December 1935, p. 39; Basilo Dimopalo, “Condiciones de trabajo y de salario de la obra textíl,” *Vida Femenina*, 6:62, September 1938, p. 7.

damaging resignation," these same women were now beginning to "go to the street to protest" their lot in life.[495] This meant that working class women might finally be ready to back the feminist organizations in the campaign for political rights. However, female working class organization and activity was not a novelty in Argentina, and the surge of activism among women laborers once again responded more to economic demands than a new political consciousness.

As the Argentine economy began to recover, union activity also revived, bringing greater female working class activism with it. For most of the 1930s, the struggle to survive meant that for many working women "life was dedicated to work exclusively" and that labor "absorbed all their energy and exhausted them." This left little time to participate in unions or politics. However, as the economic situation of the nation revived, female-dominated unions renewed their activities, making the same demands for better pay, benefits, and working hours that they had in previous decades. As in previous years the industries that saw the greatest female activity were those related to textile production, which continued to employ women in large numbers. In addition, domestic servants began to organize in larger numbers, putting pressure on the government to create stricter regulations in what was a relatively neglected field of labor. In the case of domestics, job stability was the foremost concern, as servants sought guarantees against arbitrary retribution from their employers for their labor organizing activities. The current lack of regulation of domestic service, labor organizers argued, meant that "200,000 families suffer a miserable life" as they were

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[495] Marta E. Samatín, "Cartas a mujeres: sobre la mujer y el trabajo," *Vida Femenina*, 4:43, February 1937, p. 16; Elvira López, *El movimiento feminista* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1901), 67-8; "Acción femenina," *La Protesta*, 8 December 1904; "Informe de la Doctora Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5: 17, March 1905, p. 19; "Feminismo," *El Diario*, 3 January 1919; Raquel Messina, "A las mujeres," *La Vanguardia*, 25 February 1899; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El sufragio femenino," *Humandiad Nueva*, 3:2, February 1911, p. 94; Alfredo Colmo, "Los derechos civiles de la mujer basada ante la experiencia," *La Nación*, 2 September 1925; Josefina Marpons, "Saludable Reacción Femenina," *Vida Femenina*, 4:42, January 1937, p. 20.

completely at the mercy of their employers. Women made up the vast majority of domestic service employees, and therefore bore the heaviest burden in these cases.[496] The renewed surge of female labor activism therefore demanded a response both from larger male organizations and from government. For both these groups, the responses resembled those they had given in previous decades- unions allowed for token female participation while the government passed new regulations.

With the revival of union activism, male-led unions once again encouraged female participation while minimizing female leadership in the labor movement. Officially, union leaders continued to accept the idea that "women workers and employees are, in effect, the ones that are best able to understand instinctively…the overwhelming necessity of joining the organizations of the working class" and should be encouraged in this effort. However, that encouragement did not result in concrete action for the Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT). This organization, which would become the sole national labor organization under the Perón administration, did not include any female delegates in its constituent congress of 1936. The union delegates were thus surprised when "a delegation of female commercial employees which presented [the officials] with a beautiful bouquet of flowers." The delegates responded to this gesture "with a thunderous standing ovation." Nevertheless, that the female labor activists had to make such a dramatic entrance meant that the union leaders did not initially consider them important. In later years, the CGT acknowledged the importance of women workers, responding to the statements of female members who wished to support the labor movement. These

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[496] Daniel James, *Doña Marías story, Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 42; "Lo que toda mujer debe saber sobre la carestía," *¡Mujeres!*, 1:2, May 1937, p. 3; "Tienen que organizarse las obreras costureras que trabajan a domicilio," *La Vanguardia*, 25 January 1938; "Se organiza el servicio doméstico," *CGT*, 11 August 1939; "Pro nueva ley de tabajo a domicilio," *CGT*, 18 August 1939.

declarations of female laborers made the expected relationship between working class men and women abundantly clear. Female laborers said that they wished to be "the comrade of our husbands and his most loyal friend," which meant "being able to support them and celebrate with them" and "have moral faith and use it to guide our children on the path of good and justice." With this assurance of playing a subservient role, the CGT created a special committee to review the working conditions and requirements of women. However, in the CGT congress of 1939, only four out of 175 delegates were women.[497] While women did play a role in national labor organization, the male leaders of the workers movement clearly did not see the betterment of working conditions for female laborers as a high priority. The best interests of male workers would always come first, and many men continued to see female employment as a problem to be dealt with rather than as a source of support for the worker's movement.

The root of male neglect of the demands of women workers during the 1930s had its base in both the belief that women workers lowered wages by competing unfairly with men and the notion that women simply did not belong in the workplace. Both these ideas had their roots in the earliest debates over female labor. Leftists tended to blame capitalist exploitation for the presence of women in industrial labor, reminding the public that:

> Modern machines do not require great physical or mental strength to operate. In this fashion the so-called *weaker sex* enjoyed a happy (for the capitalist) utility as the apprentices of the all-powerful machine. From the fabulous wealth that the mass of men and women (and children) produces, they only receive a few scraps and crumbs. The consequences are degeneration, alcoholism, prostitution, and so on.

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[497] Luis Ramicon, "La mujer, compañera del hombre," *Vida Femenina*, 2:16, November 1934, p. 15; "Las deliberaciones del congreso constituyente de la C.G de Trabajo," *CGT*, 10 April 1936; María Robasi de Healy, "¿Muy femenino o muy mujer?" *CGT,* 30 June 1939; "Sobre trabajo femenino," *CGT,* 14 July 1939; "Principarán hoy las sesiones del primer congreso orgánico del Confederal G. de Trabajo," *CGT*, 14 July 1939.

Therefore, the capitalist machine victimized women, and leftist reformers such as Senator Alfredo Palacios looked forward to a day when women "will not go to the workshop, the factory, or the office, focusing instead on the noble labor of motherhood." However, not all would-be reformers viewed women as victims. Many working class men continued to view women as unwelcome competitors, and sought to exclude them from the labor rights movement and the workplace altogether. This resistance to female participation frustrated many feminists, who constantly sought to convince union members and leaders that women were their allies, not their adversaries. Nevertheless, working class men continued to denigrate female workers. Many female laborers, responding to this social pressure, tended to avoid letting on that they worked at all, for fear of peer rejection.[498] This antagonism from male workers and fear from female workers made serious efforts to organize women workers in any context- either in unions or in political organizations- exceedingly difficult.

Leftists were not the only ones debating the proper role of women in the workplace. Right-wing commentators also considered the matter of female labor in modern society and came to some interesting conclusions regarding the solution to the dilemma of employing present or future mothers. Right-wing activists, like many of their leftist counterparts, supported the idea that women should make the home their first priority. Therefore, right-wing organizations provided support for women that "improve the development of their mission in the family and in society." Groups such as the Argentine Ladies Association

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[498] "El proletariado femenino: su influencia y su acción," *La Protesta*, 28 July 1906; Rosa Scheiner, "Lo real en la emancipación de la mujer," *Vide Femenina*, 2:14, September 1934, p. 20; María L Berondo, "La mujer en la fábrica," *Vida Femenina,* 8:79, May 1940, p. 28-30 (original emphasis); Justino Oddone, "La mujer y el salario mínimo," *Vida Femenina,* 7:77, March 1940, p. 27; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1935*, v. 1, p. 146; Susana Bianchi and Norma Snachís, *El partido peronista femenina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988), 123-5.

'Fatherland and Home' taught home economic courses in order to promote domestic labors. However, right-wing groups also supported some of the same measures that leftists backed in order to address the issue of female labor. Juan Magaldi, a right-winger who bemoaned the destruction of the "enchantment of femininity" that the presence of working women in society created, praised the efforts of Socialist Senator Alfredo Palacios to defend the rights of working women. Magaldi believed that regulations on female labor would make businesses less likely to hire women. Magaldi argued that female employment should be discouraged in this way in order to prevent "the lowering of salaries and the worsening of working conditions" for men. In addition, he believe that working women would be less willing to marry and start families, since they would not need men to provide for them. That activists on both the left and right wanted to limit women's access to the workforce shows that male "egoism" crossed ideological lines.[499] In the face of this pressure, the government could not afford to ignore the idea of workplace regulations for women.

The governments of the 1930s and early 40s did not tend to favor the demands of the working class, but on the surface permitted legislation responding to those demands to pass. These laws included the extension of maternity leave for working mothers and limiting work hours for retail store employees. However, these adjustments to the existing workplace laws amounted to little, since the government enforced the regulations as loosely as possible. Unofficial labor inspectors continually reported on the work conditions of men and women in factories and workshops, revealing the flagrant disregard of laws limiting work hours and exposure to unhealthy materials or dangerous machinery. Tighter enforcement of existing workplace rules became one of the

[499] "Labor desarollado por la Asociación D.A. 'Patria y Hogar,'" *Crisol*, 20 August 1933; Juan Magaldi, "Femineidad y feminismo político," *Bandera Argentina*, 15 July 1938; Juan Magaldi, "El trabajo de la mujer: acataciones a la nueva ley Palacios," *Bandera Argentina*, 12 August 1938; "Los derechos de la mujer," *La Nación*, 25 June 1938.

chief demands of national labor organizations during the 1930s, but the governments of that decade did not respond.[500] This neglect on the part of the government was part of the basis for strong worker support for Juan Perón, whose administration based its strength on the support of the working class. However, in the short term, the government ignored the demands of workers in much the same way it ignored the repeated calls of feminists for women's suffrage.

The most dramatic example of government neglect of a work issue that affected women workers especially was the stonewalling of legislation dealing with work within the home. Work within the home included both domestic service (e.g., maids, private cooks, butlers, etc.) and manufacturing or assembly work performed within the home. Congress had set minimum standards for both types of employment in 1918. The law of domestic work required employers to keep accurate records of the work done, established a salary commission to ensure fair pay and set health and hygiene standards. However, these regulations were even less strict in their provisions, and less strictly enforced, than those applied to factories or stores. In the face of this "extreme exploitation," national unions petitioned Congress to update and enforce the laws. In the late 1930s, a series of projects designed to meet these demands came before Congress. These projects, all the product of Socialist members of Congress, created a much more detailed system of inspection and regulation for those working in homes (their own or others). This system included applying the laws that pertained to other workplace environments to work out of homes, made penalties for violations stiffer and strengthened the government's ability to inspect such labor. In this

[500] República Argentina, *Leyes Nacionales año 1933* (Buenos Aires: Senado de la Nación, 1936), 129 and 228-35; República Argentina, *Leyes Nacionales año 1934* (Buenos Aires: Senado de la Nación, 1936), 4-6; "Las deliberaciones del congreso constituyente de la C.G de Trabajo," *CGT*, 10 April 1936; Ida Pecheni, "Situación de la mujer en la industria textil," *CGT*, 22 September 1939; Josefina Marpons, "Protección a la maternidad," *Vida Femenina*, 2:21, April 1935, p. 8.

way, the project's authors hoped to curb "the inhuman exploitation of women" and the "diverse methods [employers] use to elude that clauses of the law." However, Congress continually sent these projects to committee, which eventually produced a watered-down version of the original.[501] While there were those in Congress sympathetic to the demands of working class organizations, the government remained in the hands of those unwilling to make any dramatic changes to the socio-economic system in Argentina. Women workers already lacked power within the labor movement, and were therefore unable to make their voices heard in a government that would not respond to that movement.

Conclusion

As industry developed in Argentina, women found new opportunities for employment outside of the home. At the same time as middle class women entered white collar professions, lower class women rapidly entered the industrial and commercial workforce. These developments prompted concern, if not revulsion, throughout Argentine society, and consequently sparked intense debates in newspapers, union halls, and Congress. The results of the debates on women's presence in the workplace included the inclusion of women in the worker's rights movement and legislation designed to protect female laborers. Women contributed their own opinions and arguments to these debates and projects, but ultimately had no power to control the decisions of male-dominated institutions. Therefore, the policies of unions and government reacted to women in the workplace rather than respond to the demands of women themselves.

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[501] "El trabajo a domicilio," *CGT*, 19 July 1939; "Tienen que oranizarse las obreras costureras que trabajan a domicilo," *La Vanguardia*, 25 June 1935; "Se organiza el servicio doméstico," *CGT*, 11 August 1939; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1938*, v. 4, p. 4543-4547; *Diario de Sesiones de 1939*, v. 1, p. 721-39; *Diario de Sesiones de 1939*, v. 3, p. 837-43; *Diario de Sesiones de 1940*, v. 1, p. 613-17; *Diario de Sesiones de 1941*, v. 2, p. 30-53, 224-31, 416-45, 654-81.

Unions often made public statements acknowledging the importance of female participation in the labor movement. As a large and growing sector of the workforce, the organizations that claimed to represent all workers could hardly ignore women entirely. Yet labor union claims did not always reflect the reality of women's experience in the worker movement. Labor organizations usually only allowed token female representation. Unions officially supported pro-women legislation, but members tended to view women workers with condescension at best and hostility at worst. Long-standing beliefs that women belonged in the home while the man earned the "daily bread" for the family discouraged the acceptance of women as equals in the labor movement. At a more practical level, male laborers recognized that business owners paid women less than men for the same work. Women therefore supplanted men in many industrial activities, provoking resentment among male workers. Though many commentators tried to remind workers that the fault for this pay disparity lay with the managers and not with the women, it was difficult for working class men not to see women as unwelcome competitors. Therefore, the goal of many unions was to make women less appealing as employees.

The legislation that passed in Congress reflected the attitudes of male workers. Politicians tended to describe women workers as victims of the modern economy, and wrote legislation designed to protect the maternal function especially. Health reports, first introduced in the 1890s and increasing in frequency thereafter, described the horrifyingly unsafe and unsanitary conditions of the modern workplace, emphasizing its negative effects on women and children. The descriptions of the fragility of women reinforced the idea that they did not belong outside of the home. However, the modern economy did not permit the exclusion of any source of labor from the market. Economic reality, more than the arguments of feminists in favor of allowing women to work, led Congress to limit rather than prohibit female labor. While enforcement of these

limitations was sporadic, at best, they had the net effect of containing women to the industries in which they already worked in large numbers. The legislation provided some of the benefits that female workers desired, but for reasons unrelated to the efforts of women themselves.

Women continued to enter or exit the labor force according to economic necessity, but social and political pressure affected the choices they made about work. Female workers did create their own unions in order to press their demands for higher wages, better benefits and shorter working hours on employers. In addition, women actively participated in neighborhood groups that called for improvements in living conditions, such as during the rent strike of 1907. Female professionals also banded together to form associations to defend their interests in the face of poor remuneration and discrimination. However, sexism weighed heavily on the minds of most working women. Feminists defended the right of women to work, assuring the public that their labor would be a boon to society. But most women, when faced with the disapproval of their neighbors and families tended to shy away from overt action in public. Working class women avoided, insofar as possible, the disapproval of those that saw them as competitors or as symptoms of social decay. This reticence prompted some commentators to praise their forbearance, while others decried their seeming apathy. In the end, it required a new movement under Juan and Evita Perón to unleash the potential of working women in both national politics and the labor movement.

Chapter VII
Feminist Issues- Social Aid and Reform

> The bourgeois does not want to protect childhood. It only pretends to do so. And even if it wanted to, it could not, because it is not a question of protecting children, women, or men, but rather of making sure that they do not need protection.
>
> -*El Libertario*[502]

> For us, the question of feminism is not isolated, not even in the abstract, from the social problem. Even when it signifies the emancipation of women, it cannot refer to them alone: to elevate women is to elevate children, men the family, humanity.
>
> -Alicia Moreau[503]

As the feminists developed their arguments for the vote, they proceeded to implement their own brand of social aid while lobbying Congress to improve services and reform legal codes where necessary. Feminist leaders and organizations provided a variety of services to Argentine women, with particular attention to education and improvements in workplace conditions. The school and the factory, however, did not represent the only areas of concern to feminist reformers. The domestic sphere continued to represent the basis for arguments in favor of suffrage, and so the home remained the focus of feminist reforms. Feminists targeted those areas of society they believed to be most critical to life in the ideal home, petitioning the government to make changes as needed. These issues included the prohibition of alcohol, limitations on gambling, recognition of illegitimate children, elimination of legal prostitution and the white slave trade, improvements in public health, legalization of full divorce, and the

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[502] "Protección de la niñez," *El Libertario*, 14 August 1920.

[503] Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El feminismo en la evolución social," *Humanidad Nueva*, 10 October 1911, p. 357.

advancement of the peace movement. While not all of these issues had a clear connection to life within the home, feminists drew connections that helped clear the way for greater female participation in political debates. By linking domestic life to issues as diverse as foreign policy and public health, feminists gradually acclimated the larger public to the awareness that women could intelligently and legitimately contribute to the political discourse.

In their development of arguments in favor of social reforms, Argentine feminists continued to follow the patterns laid out in European and North American movements. Many of the issues that Argentine suffragists raised also came up in debates over female voting rights in these other countries, particularly in the English-speaking world. Furthermore, just as with the international suffrage movement, successes in the progress of these reforms abroad gave encouragement and additional rhetorical support for female activists. This pattern makes itself particularly clear in the prohibition and anti-prostitution campaigns. In the case of alcohol, Argentine feminists echoed the arguments of prohibitionists elsewhere by emphasizing the pernicious influence of liquor on the home. Prohibition in the United States caused rejoicing among many Argentine feminists, who backed a series of laws designed to gradually eliminate the sale and production of spirits in the nation. The link between the anti-prostitution campaign and foreign movements had a more direct link. As Donna Guy has demonstrated so capably, European, and especially British, women reformers targeted the white slave trade in Argentina as a danger to the morals and safety of women in their homelands.[504] Argentine feminists found white slavery and legal prostitution equally distasteful, viewing them as a threat to the family in both a moral sense and in terms of health. While direct co-operation between the two groups was limited, they nevertheless moved towards the same ends. Anti-

[504] Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

alcohol and anti-prostitution campaigns, for the most part, enjoyed the support of all major branches of Argentine feminism. All feminists agreed that alcohol and prostitution constituted threats to the well-being of the nation.

Both the anti-alcohol and anti-prostitution campaigns found an echo in the broader drive for improvements in public health. The supposed nurturing instinct of all women made health policy an intuitive and defensible fir for female activism. Many of the most prominent feminist leaders had medical backgrounds, so this issue proved an intuitive extension of their expertise. Feminists participated most actively in the development of health programs for women and children, once again reflecting concern for the family. These proposals met a receptive audience. Public health support did not generate controversy, merely debates over priorities and funding. As a result, feminists did not devote the same passionate rhetoric to this issue as they did other topics. Nevertheless, attention to health and welfare remained a constant in the political agenda of nearly every women's political organization in Argentina.

Alcohol, prostitution and gaps in public health services provided ready examples of threats to the home, and feminists of all kinds could agree on the need to combat them. Argentine feminists displayed less unity and enthusiasm in support of issues such as divorce and recognition of illegitimate children, as both these propositions could themselves be construed as threats to the family as well. Divorce retained its colonial-era significance in Argentina. A couple, under the civil code, could legally separate with due cause, but could not re-marry. Advocates of divorce sought the right to absolute legal dissolution of marriage. Divorce became a particularly divisive subject for feminists, with Socialist feminists backing absolute divorce and Conservative feminists resisting it. Given the dominance of Catholic doctrine in guiding attitudes towards marriage, the case for absolute divorce faced a particularly difficult challenge. Nevertheless, leftist feminists persisted in their advocacy, and Socialist members

of Congress regularly brought forward divorce legislation throughout the early twentieth century. The issue of recognition of illegitimate children, by contrast, represented a lesser priority. While leftist feminists decried the injustice of allowing men to escape their paternal obligations, they proved less successful in drawing attention to this issue. In this case, the uncomfortable issue of adultery and male sexual license may have contributed to political negligence of the issue. Responsibility for unwanted children remained a burden for women to carry during this period. Together, the divorce and legitimacy issues represented the subjects most directly related to family life in Argentina. As a result, the debates surrounding them produced some of the most passionate rhetoric and careful analysis produced by the feminists.

In contrast to divorce and legitimacy, the international peace movement proved the most remote issue for feminists relative to the firm foundation of the domestic realm. This issue, which grew in prominence during World War I, became the principal avenue for female involvement in foreign policy, an area that otherwise remained distant from the feminist agenda. Feminists used women's maternal role to establish their legitimate support and involvement in the issue. They argued that mothers wanted to protect their sons, and that they could not support the reckless endangerment of their children in warfare. Argentine feminists therefore fully supported international campaigns in favor of disarmament and the League of Nations. This initial support splintered over the course of the 1930's and 40's as left-wing feminists backed first the Spanish Republicans and then the allies during World War II. These feminists organized humanitarian relief efforts in favor of these combatants. However, while the desire for peace may not have waned, public support of non-violence disappeared as hostilities spread.

The success of these programs varied widely, some awaiting the rise of Peronism become real. Limits on alcohol and other vices met with limited

success, experiencing its heyday in the 1920's. At that time, laws restricting alcohol sales came into effect, and feminists hoped to gradually eliminate this commerce altogether. The collapse of prohibition in the United States, however, dealt a heavy blow to this particular campaign, which petered out in the 1930's. Anti-prostitution fared better- based largely on arguments of health, Argentina made the oldest profession illegal in 1937. Divorce and recognition of illegitimate children both came before Congress throughout the early twentieth century, but did not receive approval until the time of Perón's feud with the Catholic Church. The peace movement did well in the 1920's, once again, but the rise of fascism in Europe tempered feminist support of this cause. Public health remained a popular feminist issue, as it showed no signs of becoming superfluous. On balance, the feminists could claim a satisfactory track record in their lobbying efforts. In the process, they reinforced their overall argument that women could and should be political agents equal with men.

Alcoholism and Gambling

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, feminists made morality a central theme of their arguments. Since women supposedly possessed an inherently moral nature, such an approach made sense. Furthermore, the image of the woman as "queen of the home" made her the natural choice to lead any efforts to eradicate those vices that did the most damage to a happy and healthy family life. Following this reasoning and inspired by their counterparts in the U.S especially, Argentine feminists targeted alcohol and, to a lesser extent, gambling, as problems in need of elimination. Both as mothers and, in certain cases, as physicians, feminists built their case for prohibition, seeking a gradual reduction in the sale and importation of alcohol. Their allies in Congress, chiefly Socialists, regularly brought forward proposals, as well as reams of scientific evidence,

designed to curb alcoholism in Argentina, though the total prohibition of alcohol rarely served as the primary focus of their efforts.

The prohibition movement in Argentina had existed at least as long as the suffrage campaign, and had a distinct history. Both the Catholic Church and the Socialist Party had issued statements in favor of limiting, if not prohibiting, alcohol sales in the nation from the beginning of the twentieth century. During its first meeting in 1902, the Argentine Collective Pastoral Episcopate declared that "The gruesome effects of this vice are not limited to the individual, but are transmitted from father to son, sowing the seeds of disgrace through the family." Economic consequences also guided their arguments: "In addition, alcoholism impoverishes the people, limiting the means to build up wealth…and reduces the common labor force."[505] Socialist prohibitionists echoed these concerns for the biological, domestic, and economic consequences of alcohol. "A worker declines little by little in his labor" wrote Augusto Bunge in his treatise on alcoholism. "His strength diminishes, his character worsens, his intelligence is dulled; the home, once tranquil and comfortable, is slowly invaded by a misery that grows ever more sordid, by a discord ever more profound."[506] In both of these analyses, there is a tendency to see alcoholism as a threat not simply to the home, but specifically to the working class home. Bunge attributes this increase in working class alcoholism to the increased availability of spirits following the industrial revolution.[507] Nevertheless, these reformers, who were largely intellectuals and members of the elite, tended to identify alcoholism as a social threat located in

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[505] Néstor Tomás Auza, ed. *Documentos del Episcopado Argentino 1889-1909*, Vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Conferencia Epicopal Argentina, 1993), 134. The conference at in question took place in 1902.

[506] Augusto Bunge, *El alcoholismo* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Luz, 1910), 11.

[507] Bunge, *El alcoholismo.,* 4-5. Bunge even went so far as to attribute the rise of socialism to the reaction against alcoholism

the working class. This perception colored the attitudes and arguments feminists would make in their efforts to advance the prohibition agenda.

The campaign against alcohol united many feminists regardless of ideological affiliation, strengthening the effort to fight alcoholism among working class individual especially. However, they did not call for an immediate or total elimination of alcohol production and sales. Instead, feminists tended to support a campaign of public education combined with government regulation and gradual reduction of availability. The conservative Consejo Nacional de Mujeres (CNM), for example, displayed its ability to successfully lobby the government when the National Education Council required all schools to include instruction on the dangers of alcohol in their classes. The women of the CNM supported this measure in order to "prepare today's children to fight against this enemy of society, the race and the human family."[508] This declaration suggests that conservative feminists expected the elimination of alcohol consumption to be a long-term process, not to be achieved rapidly. Indeed, later publications from the CNM suggest a degree of flexibility on their part. Seven years after the inauguration of official anti-alcohol education, the CNM's temperance league declared that "we [are not] in favor of total abstinence, because we consider it necessary to prepare public opinion without running to extremes." Their proposals included the reduction in the alcohol content of beverages, high taxes and tariffs on all alcohol sales, prohibiting the sale of alcohol on Sundays, the creation of reformatories for alcoholics, and the outright banning of liquors such

[508] "Informe de la liga de templanza del consejo," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 20:69-70, September 1920, p. 26. The CNM temperance league, like the CNM itself, enjoyed connection to the international feminist and prohibition movements such as Frances Willard's Women's Christian Temperance Union. See "Discurso pronunciado por la Sra. Hardinia K. Noville, delegada de la Unión Mundial de Templanza de Señoras Cristianas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 17:60-2, November 1917, p. 55-6 and Patricia Ward D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848-1948* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 39.

as *ajenjo* (absinthe), widely consumed by the working class.[509] Therefore, while the impact of most of these reforms affected all of society, the CNM nevertheless demonstrated a particular interest in lower class alcoholism. The Conservatives, as ever, wished to reinforce social order through their brand of reformism. In many respects, the Socialist feminists differed little from their male colleagues and Conservative counterparts on this issue. The angle of approach that individual Socialists followed naturally varied from person to person, but the specific arguments remained consistent. Some chose to emphasize "industrial chemistry" as the cause for increases in alcoholism. These feminists stressed the efficiency of modern alcohol producers, making this vice more accessible to the working class.[510]

Male and female prohibitionists also relied on the United States as an example, whether positive or negative. In the first years following prohibition in the U.S., Argentine references to the Eighteenth Amendment tended to be laudatory. Ricardo Castellanos, for example, praised "the prominent lesson that our elder brother to the north just gave to the world, when with one single law it imposed a radical remedy, tearing out a scourge to humanity by the root…only in this does one combat evil."[511] Feminists echoed these sentiments, asserting that "many countries should imitate the 'dry law'". These same feminists also recognized that in addition to prohibition, government education and moral persuasion in order to thoroughly eradicate the problem.[512] Feminists even reprinted American prohibition arguments in their journals, emphasizing the

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[509] Fanny Cármen de Cantón, "Informe de la liga de templanza del consejo," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 27:98-9, September 1927, p. 24-5.

[510] Irma Spadero, "El alcoholismo," *Unión y Labor,* 4:50, November 1913, p. 17.

[511] Miguel J. Font, ed. *La mujer: encuesta femenista argentina* (Buenos Aires: NP, 1921?), 171.

[512] Adela T. de Cassinelli, "El alcoholismo: terible flagelo de la humanidad," *Acción Femenina*, 5:52, November 1926, p. 4.

similarities in their arguments, such as the harm done to families and the need to educate the public on the dangers of alcohol.[513] However, as time went by and the complications of prohibition in the U.S. became apparent Argentine activists could not ignore the limits of anti-alcohol legislation. Skepticism over the ability of Argentina to enforce prohibition colored these arguments, as reformers turned their efforts to alternative solutions.[514] Combined with the existing resistance of manufacturers and distributors, the collapse of U.S prohibition ultimately proved to be an overwhelming obstacle for advocates of banning alcohol in Argentina.

Feminists and prohibitionists did succeed in influencing official opinion during the 1910's and 20's despite the best efforts of Argentine alcohol producers. The national press was sympathetic to strategies of social pacification tended to favor the restriction of alcohol. Efforts to discourage alcohol consumption through education met with encouragement from the national press. *La Prensa* noted the development of "well conceived and simply prepared" temperance classes with clear approval, and urged that such teaching be implemented across the nation.[515] However, the press also recognized the difficulties in enforcing existing alcohol regulations, as well as citing the ongoing difficulties the United States faced in enforcing prohibition. "Advanced" ideas such as limiting the percentage of alcohol allowed in beverages met with skepticism from major newspapers.[516] While in favor of combating alcoholism the major newspapers clearly lacked enthusiasm for strict laws in this area.

The hesitancy to pursue aggressive anti-alcohol policies demonstrated in the press also colored congressional debates and activities on the subject. As

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[513] Mary F. Lowell, "Trabajos redentores en las escuelas norteamericanos," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3, September 1901, p. 27.

[514] Angel M. Giménez, *Represión del alcoholismo* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Luz, 1932), 11-2.

[515] "Enseñanza antialcoholica," *La Prensa,* 19 October 1924.

[516] "La represión del alcoholismo," *La Nación*, 11 September 1926.

early as 1907, Congress began to discuss the impact of alcoholism on the nation. As with the reform of the Civil Code and other cherished feminist projects, the impetus for alcohol reform came from, and was sustained by, the socialists throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Alfredo Palacios, the first socialist to serve in the national congress, set the precedent that would guide future efforts to curb alcohol consumption. The first part of his project called for liquor license fees to be doubled. At that time, Palacios noted, tavern owners paid a certification fee "almost equal to that of a bakery, which is truly absurd." Palacios went on to note that in many cities in the United States, a nation "always marching at the vanguard when it comes to questions of social nature," higher fees had led many taverns to close and forced those that remained to raise their prices, to the benefit of the community. Part two of the project would have banned the sale of absinthe. The "green venom", as Palacios named it, "is the most important factor in the degeneration of the species". Absinthe, derived from toxic substances such as wormwood, seemed to epitomize the dangers posed by alcohol. Its prohibition, therefore, represented a test case for the complete restriction of alcohol production and sales. The law ultimately did not pass, lingering indefinitely, as the women's suffrage projects so often did, in committee.[517] However, neglect did not prevent the socialists from trying again. Projects echoing the Palacios proposal came before congress into the late 1930's, but did not go unchallenged. Alcohol producers, associations of restaurateurs, grocery store owners, sugar producers, and the governors of major wine producing provinces such as Mendoza all petitioned Congress to prevent or reduce the impact of alcohol regulations. This effectively limited the progress of prohibition legislation.

[517] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1907,* v. 1, p. 174-9.

Palacios' arguments in favor of the restriction of alcohol sales also echoed, and influenced, the rhetoric wielded by the feminists and other alcohol reformers. In his speech to congress, he emphasized the negative impact of alcohol on the working class. "The worker," he declared, "whose nutrition is deficient, finds himself obliged to restore his spent strength by ingesting quantities of alcohol that acts on his nervous system and ruins his body." He also reiterated the broader social and biological consequences of alcohol. Drinking produces "the degeneration of the sons of the poor and of the rich as well…it causes the breakdown of family ties, atrophies intelligence, kills willpower and encourages criminality." Palacios reinforced these broad declarations with statistics gleaned from medical research and government reports, while comparing his plan and the national consumption of alcohol to other nations. This underscored the point that all "civilized" nations had to address the insidious effects of alcohol consumption in their populations.[518] Emphasis on the need to both modernize the nation while defending the traditional family bulwark of society permeated the discussions on the subject of alcohol regulation much as it did with debates over women's suffrage and other feminist issues. Nevertheless, Palacios also recognized that the complete elimination of alcoholism was impossible- his project and those that succeeded it aimed to curb the impact of alcohol on society- not eliminate it altogether.

Gambling, another perceived threat to the community, served as a secondary target for moral reformers, who used arguments similar to they those wielded against alcohol production. "Gambling, like alcoholism," wrote one reformer, "is a repugnant pox that ruins society and destroys the family." By encouraging laziness and lack of thrift, gambling promoted the disintegration of families. Another feminist placed the burden of combating gambling on mothers

[518] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1907,* v. 1, p. 174-9.

and teachers, claiming that they should "spot the exaggerated tendencies of the child, that which becomes a passion, and orient it towards a dignified end." Gambling, in her opinion, had a particularly pernicious effect on women. Female gamblers faced the "complete decay of their moral and physical strength" and "ineptitude" for "all methodical labor."[519] While gambling could not be said to have the same impact on human health as alcohol, these reformers nevertheless saw the two vices as equally dangerous.

While anti-gambling initiatives did not catch on to the same extent as anti-alcohol campaigns, efforts to curb gambling nevertheless made an appearance in Congress. Indeed, efforts to curb the ill effects of gambling predated those introduced to fight alcoholism. In this first project, deputy Pastor Lacasa intended to ban betting on sporting events, including horse races, in the capital city- the "brain" of the nation. To justify this action, Lacasa relied on familiar moral argument. "Youths go to the hippodrome," he claimed, "to be initiated in the vice of gambling" and became so enamoured of it that they had to be forced to leave and perform their civic duties. Workers, too, squandered their money on this "reckless game, that generally despoils them of their property without leaving him with what he needs to fulfill the most urgent necessities of life." Lacasa backed these assertions with calculations of the amounts spent on gambling and testimony from judges reflecting the contribution gambling made to the encouragement of vice. Lacasa's arguments further paralleled those of anti-alcohol legislation he acknowledged that complete elimination of gambling seemed impossible, but that it required restriction nevertheless for the good of society.[520] As with the Palacios project, the Lacasa project lingered in committee, but fresh attempts to curb gambling appeared throughout the next few decades.

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[519] Juan Negro, "El juego, factor de disolución social," *Vida Feminina*, 3:29, December 1935, p. 24; Emma Day, "La mujer y el juego," *Revista Filosófica,* 6:6, November 1920, p.352-8.

[520] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1901*, v. 1, p. 580-3.

As test cases for female political activism, anti-alcohol and anti-gambling encountered mixed results. While only moderately successful in achieving their stated aims, these reform projects nevertheless expanded on the precedent of female involvement on broader social issues. The failure of absolute prohibition of alcohol and gambling in no way tarnished the ability of feminists to make their cases heard. On the contrary, their participation in prominent debates only served to raise their profile and made it easier for them to make the case that women voters would support the moral improvement of society. However, to be truly successful in this effort, feminists required a more substantial victory in their social reform agenda.

The White Slave Trade and the Struggle against Prostitution

Feminist attitudes and strategies regarding the elimination of regulated bordellos mirrored their response to alcoholism in many ways. Feminists highlighted both the moral and physical degradation prostitution could bring, raising the specter of sexually transmitted diseases in both cases. As with the fight against other vices, they amassed considerable evidence, both statistical and anecdotal, to bolster their cause. Their efforts also found allies among foreign feminists and reform groups- specifically the Uruguayan feminist Paulina Luisi and the British anti-white slavery crusaders. However, the campaign against prostitution also differed from those against alcohol and gambling in several respects. First, the abolition of legalized prostitution did indeed take shape in the 1930's, providing the feminists a much-needed victory during a period hostile to their movement. Second, foreign involvement proved much more active in this particular issue- British reformers came to Buenos Aires to combat the white slave trade that brought European women to the city to work as prostitutes. On a more basic level, anti-prostitution proved to be a much more

vital issue for feminists because it clearly diminished the status of women within Argentine society.

The toleration and regulation of prostitution had existed in Argentina and other Latin American nations since the days of independence. Legislators defended this practice with the assertion that it provided a safe outlet for male sexuality and that regulation could control unsafe and unsanitary practices could be controlled. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the moral and medical rationales behind this policy elicited ever sharper critiques from feminists and reformers alike. Uruguayan feminist Paulina Luisi summed up the moralistic critique most succinctly. To her, "there is no social danger that more deeply offends feminine dignity, that more profoundly depresses, injures or destroys the most sacred respect due to women and mothers" than the continued toleration of legal prostitution. Furthermore, she argued that only when women took the lead in challenging this state of affairs did things begin to change.[521] Towards this end, Luisi traveled to Argentina regularly to promote her ideas and to encourage feminists in that country to combat prostitution.[522] The Mexican feminist Leanor Llach contributed to the debate in later years, asserting that traditional education emphasizing women's subservience created an atmosphere conducive to prostitution. "If the morality of women were not formed through fear and obedience," Llach argued, "but rather through a sense of responsibility and the knowledge of a complete life and if she received ample instruction, the path of prostitution would be the last thing that would occur to her, because any other activity in life would be easier." For Llach, the societal limitation on women's work and their lack of liberty explained why so many women resigned themselves

[521] Paulina Luisi, *Otra voz clamando en el desierto: proxenetismo y reglamentación* (Montevideo: Universidad de Montevideo, 1948), 12.

[522] "La trata de blancas, la conferenciade la doctora Luisi," *La Razón*, 22 May 1918.

to prostitution.[523] These types of arguments, familiar in many feminist discourses on social issues, carried particular weight in the fight against a practice that touched directly on women's role in society.

Foreign influence from beyond Latin America also shaped feminist attitudes towards prostitution in Argentina, motivating them to combat the white slave trade and legal prostitution regardless of political affiliation. The issue of white slavery invited foreign involvement in Argentine affairs. The traffic in women across the Atlantic received considerable attention in the popular press of Europe, and organizations sent representatives to Argentina to intercept any potential victims of this trade. This activity included soliciting the assistance of Argentine feminists. In 1904, May Wright Sewall, a leading figure in the International Council of Women, petitioned the Argentine National Council of Women to assist in their efforts to restrict the trade. The Council's answer was to turn the matter over to their youth protection league with the assurance that "it would take up the subject."[524] While this declaration did not contain the energetic response the European and U.S feminists may have desired, it nevertheless demonstrated that Conservative feminists recognized the problem as real and relevant, if not as a priority. A series of international conventions throughout the first half of the twentieth century reiterated the commitment of Europe to the elimination of white slavery and the suppression of prostitution. These conventions, beginning in 1904, called for international cooperation in monitoring the movement of young women through ports and rail stations. Later conventions declared that any woman under twenty years old brought into the

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[523] Leanor Llach, "La influencia del medio en la prostitución," *Vida Femenina*, 2:19 February 1935, p. 27.

[524] "Acta de la sesión del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, No. 16, December 1904, p. 3-4. For Sewall's role in the ICW, see *Cross currents in the International Women's Movement* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 71-3.

white slave trade by any means, and any woman older than twenty coerced into the trade, required rescue. Following World War I, the League of Nations banned the white slave trade and authorized studies to combat it.[525] International opinion clearly opposed the continuation of the white slave trade, and Argentina formally outlawed the practice in 1913.

Despite legislation against it, white slavery persisted in Argentina, as did legalized prostitution. Feminists therefore continued to work against both of these evils, forming organizations to assist in the process. Socialists contributed to the fight against prostitution and white slavery through their social aid group the Sociedad Luz, and through co-operation with the Argentine League of Social Prophilaxis. The Socialist press hailed the efforts of these two organizations, crediting them with raising public awareness regarding "the dangers of this sickness."[526] Socialists framed their attacks on prostitution within a larger context of social reform. They argued that better working and living conditions would eliminate the need for women to resort to prostitution to earn a living. The eight-hour workday, better hygiene, fairer salaries and the creation of worker libraries would all contribute to "the transformation of our social inferno into a more humane society" and therefore eliminate the injustices that purportedly allowed prostitution to thrive.[527] This approach provided an alternative to the outright banning of prostitution- cutting down on the supply of prostitutes by improving the overall conditions for women within the nation. However, the success of workplace regulations for women in 1920's apparently did not fulfill the expectations of socialist feminists regarding prostitution, and the campaign continued into the 1930's.

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[525] Luisi, *Otra voz…*, 12-26.

[526] Ley de profilaxis de las enfermedades venereas," *La Vanguardia*, 25 December 1936.

[527] "El problema de la prostitución," *La Vanguardia,* 17 September 1904.

The mainstream press and other feminists contributed to the attack on prostitution in the nation as well, building the case for the 1936 law that finally outlawed the oldest profession. The context for this shift in attitudes towards prostitution developed well before the turn of the century. In his 1882 treatise on women and the law, Santiago Vaca Guzman made the case that both men and women were to blame for the ills of prostitution, in both the literal and metaphorical sense. "The fallen woman," he wrote, "is a useless mold, a denaturalized being that conspires against herself, that has deviated from any fruitful mission in social life." A man that "seeks her favors" on the other hand "is something worse than she is, since he knows that he brings the seed of other lives to a sterile breast."[528] This argument encapsulated the view that prostitution led to biological as well as moral degeneracy, and that a modern nation should discourage commercial sex. Following the ban on white slavery in 1913, the press contributed additional material to combat prostitution by publishing stories of men who attempted to force their lovers into "shameful commerce."[529] Such stories and critiques of men who sought the service of prostitutes underlined the feminist agenda of holding men as well as women responsible for the sexual trade.

The final blow in the battle against legal prostitution came in 1936 with a law designed to combat venereal disease. Law 12.331 included provisions to disseminate sexual education, establish health care facilities for the treatment of venereal disease, and required that men must be declared free of such illnesses before being allowed to marry. The fifteenth article of the law prohibited

[528] Santiago Vaca Guzmán, *La mujer ante la lei civil, la política y el matrimonio* (Buenos Aires: Pablo E. Coni, 1882), 7.

[529] "Los explotadores de mujeres" *El Diario*, 7 February 1924.

"locations where prostitution was practiced or initiated" throughout the nation.[530] The inclusion of such a measure in a law designed to combat sexually transmitted disease obviously underscored the central importance of public health to the elimination of legal prostitution. However, the speeches made during discussion of the law revealed that feminists and reformers had not made the moral arguments in vain. Angel Giménez, a socialist deputy, noted that "in all countries where the culture of the people advances, regulated prostitution declines in importance." He also cited cases where prostitutes were often perfectly willing to pursue other means of making a living when alternatives were available, thus emphasizing once again the material origins of prostitution. Enrique Manchet seconded these sentiments, noting that the "infamous trade…revolves around poor women" and condemned the men who got wealthy from prostitution while "honest men work day and night and often live in poverty."[531] Although no one expected prostitution itself to disappear, the continued legal toleration of prostitution was at an end. Prostitution continued as a criminal enterprise, pursued irregularly by the police.

Not all feminists adopted the legal solution to the issue of sexual commerce. Anarchists, always iconoclastic in their approach to social mores and gender relations, embraced the principle of free love as the most effective means to eliminate prostitution. Anarchists did not doubt that prostitution was a "social ill" that helped promote physical illness as well. However, they also argued that there was little that legislation could do to truly regulate intimate relations between men and women. The restraints placed on female sexuality contributed to societal breakdown far more than prostitution itself did. The only crime, in their opinion, was to abandon a woman in need. Abandonment more than anything

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[530] Secretaria del senado de la nación, *Leyes nacionales, año 1936* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso, 1936), 51-6.

[531] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados *Diario de Sesiones de 1936*, v. 4, p. 936 and 945-7.

contributed to the continuation of prostitution, since "only a simpleton with the soul of a seminary student thinks that those who have fallen into the brothel have gone there for love of vice." To remove legal restraints and end "the tragedy of the celibate female" therefore represented a viable option to prostitution- legal or illegal.[532]

For some anarchist feminists, sexual liberty represented the central principle and goal of feminism, the realization of which would utterly eliminate the mark for prostitution. Societal limitations on sexuality represented to anarchists a wholly artificial and therefore improper construction. "Many would not refrain from uniting freely," one anarchist asserted, "if they did not fear the criticism of others, and only this constrains them." Because wives and husbands were forced to support one another's "faults and idiosyncrasies" true instability came through marriage, not free love.[533] The emphasis on sexual relations connected feminism to its basic social matter- the role of women in society. Interestingly, some of these anarchist arguments made use of themes prevalent in other feminist arguments. Lorenzo Mario, for example, claimed that "free love will regenerate humanity," for modern science had "demonstrated that the fruits of beings united by true love are always stronger, more robust and better prepared for life than the fruits of unions that lack these feelings." He went on to mock traditional marriages as backwards and ridiculous. "The bourgeois fear that free love will dissolve families," he wrote, "that is to say: it will dissolve the current family built on a false basis, the tyrannical family where only the strongest rules." The modern family, by contrast, would arise out of love alone.[534] Irene Bors added to this reasoning with her claim that educating young men and women to

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[532] Fedor Buzarof, "La mujer y la cuestión social," *Nervio*, 1:3, July 1931; Julio R. Barcos, *Libertad sexual de las mujeres* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Togudini, n.d.), 17-18.

[533] "El amor libre: ¿por qué lo queremos?" *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:1 8 January 1896.

[534] Lorenzo Mario, "El amor libre," *La Protesta*, 26 September 1906.

be free would lead them to embrace freedom in their personal relationships, perpetuating liberty through future generations.[535] For anarchists, the only just basis for sexual relations was either total chastity for men and women or total sexual freedom, and it was clear which was preferable.[536] Even non-anarchists accepted that feminism contained a strong potential to shift views on sexuality. Juan Carlos Rébora, in his discussion of women's legal rights, placed sexual freedom center stage:

> What this [ideology] contains, in larval form, for some, and a deliberate though tacit end, for others, is a move towards sexual liberty, which since the days of the patriarchs has been a reality for men never for women- a situation that morality has only occasionally reproached and that judicial institutions have tolerated if not protected surreptitiously.[537]

While Rébora clearly distinguished liberty from "license", the importance of women's equality in sexual relations clearly preoccupied certain feminists. Nevertheless, the focus on moral and physical health remained central to feminist arguments on the subject of commercial sex, particularly in regards to the welfare of children. Those born out of wedlock, and thus outside of established moral values, proved an especially thorny problem to feminists and social reformers.

Feminists united in their critique of the legal status of illegitimate children. Officially, men in Argentina enjoyed the option of declaring their paternity. This state of affairs, feminists argued, forced an intolerable situation on the children, who were more likely to lead a depraved life as a result. The government could accomplish this, reformers argued, by giving parents an incentive to recognize their children, and by permitting children "to live without immediate classification

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[535] Irene Bors, "La mujer y su libertad sexual," *Humanidad Nueva,* July 1928, p. 22.

[536] Barcos, *Libertad Sexual*…, 10.

[537] Juan Carlos Rébora, *La emancipación de la mujer: el aporte de la jurisprudencia* (Buenos Aires: La Facultad, 1929), 18-19.

as degenerates and vagrants."[538] Both Socialist and Conservative feminists took issue with the legal status of illegitimate children, arguing that the abandonment of children contributed greatly to criminality and degradation.[539] However, legislative project on the subject died in committee, with little or no debate on the floor of Congress.[540] Although no legislative proposal on the subject succeeded until the end of the Perón regime, feminist arguments on the subject remained as an indictment of unrestrained male sexuality. In combination with their contributions to the debate on prostitution, support of a change in legitimacy statutes added to an evolution of attitudes towards marital relations.

Public Health

Concern over public health permeated many of the social reform campaigns of the feminists. The medical training of Cecilia Grierson, Julieta Lanteri and Alicia Moreau de Justo, to name just the most prominent examples, shaped the agenda of feminist organizations throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to the biological threats posed by alcohol and prostitution, feminists contributed to the broader effort to improve the overall health and hygiene of the population. This concern for health contributed to feminist actions related to the need to protect the health of women in order to

[538] Juan P. Presíaco "Hijos legítimos e ilegítimos," *Vida Femenina*, 1:13, August 1934, p. 7; Pablo Ramella, *Reformas a la constitución de San Juan: Palabras esperanzadas sobre el futuro de San Juan* (San Juan: S.J Nuribe Yanzón, 1943), 40.

[539] Juan P. Presíaco "Hijos legítimos e ilegítimos," *Vida Femenina*, 1:13, August 1934, p. 7; Rodolfo Rivarola, "Influencia de la legislación actual a la inmoralidad y el delito, desde la edad infantil, y bases para una reforma," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, September/October 1932, p. 6.

[540] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1913*, v. 3, p.166-7; *Diario de sesiones de1922*, v.2, p. 9-14; *Diario de sesiones,1928*, v.3, p. 417-22; *Diario de sesiones de1932*, v.4, p. 667-71.

safeguard the well-being of future generations represented a central argument of the feminist discourse in Argentina. Feminist leaders sought to use their status in the medical community in order to influence public policy, allowing them access to the political system. Public health fit in well with the image of women as nurturing and caring maternal figures, and provided a ready means to influence public policy.[541] Thus, the feminist health policy campaigns mirrored those for political rights as women adopted their prescribed role in society while simultaneously attempting to change that society.

For socialists the pursuit of public health provided a means for addressing other issues indirectly, but effectively. Once convinced of the health risks that poor wages and unhealthy living conditions posed, workers "will feel the necessity of pursuing a better salary, that permit him to live as human beings deserve, and he will fight tirelessly towards that end."[542] For others, as we have seen, the interests of public health provided a strong rationale for the elimination of both alcohol sales and legal prostitution. Politicians that resisted these reforms could therefore find themselves open to attacks claiming that they endangered the health and well-being of the entire population.[543] The pursuit of improvements in public health followed the usual patterns of forming organizations and pursuing favorable legislation. In addition, feminist medical professionals took an active role in health conferences, especially relating to issues of female or child health.

The creation of societies and organizations designed to address a particular health-care issue followed familiar patterns for feminist and reformist groups of all types. Several such groups existed before the foundation of the

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[541] Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 97.

[542] "La tuberculosis," *La Vanguardia,* 2 September 1899.

[543] "Notas de Redacción," *Unión y Labor*, 4:50, November 1913, p.2.

conservative National Council of Women in 1900, and joined that organization in support of its goals. Some of these groups aimed to combat a particular illness. The Sociedad de Madres Argentinas, for example, organized in 1897 "in order to protect poor children from diphtheria" through education and the distribution of medicines. Others, such as the Sociedad Le Donne Italiane, took on a broader mission through the creation of hospitals. The NCW itself preferred to focus on the health and hygiene of children through the Comisión Activa del Bienestar del Niño. This committee resolved to provide information and health inspections and "to mitigate, if possible, the great pains of childhood." For all of these organizations, the maternal nature of health care with its emphasis on "self-denial" and "protection" imbued their activities. The Council, according to Elia Martínez, possessed "apostles of science" and "strong spirits devoid of extraordinary vanity and archaic prejudices" that would surely overcome the ills of society.[544]

The National Council of Women, concerned with the moral character of the health profession supported a professional organization, the Sociedad Incorporada Obstétrica Nacional. This organization sought to promote the "progress of the country" and "to demonstrate to other nations that the profession of midwives, considered in almost every country as…a morally corrupt element, can lift its head high with the dignity of an honest and honorable woman." Towards that end, the Sociedad investigated midwives in cooperation with the department of hygiene in order to weed out those who practiced their profession

[544] Adela B. de Canale, "Sociedad 'Le Donne Italiane,'" *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3 September 1901, p. 23; "Sociedad Madres Argentinas," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 1:3, September 1901, p. 26-7; "Informe de la comisión activa del beinestar del niño," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres,* 28:100, September 1928, p. 21; Elia M. Martínez, "Informe de la presidenta de la comisión de prensa y propaganda" *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 19:64-6, September 1919, p. 17.

without university training.[545] Such direct involvement demonstrated the access feminists could have to government, and well as the seriousness of the issue of proper public health. That they targeted women working in a basic health-care service further reflected the desire of the conservative feminists to control "bad" women and promote a particular view of modernity- only properly trained health-care providers could practice their craft. For these feminists, women could only contribute to society by following official guidelines.

Socialists demonstrated equal vigor in their efforts to combat poor public health conditions. Groups such as the Liga Argentina Contra la Tuberculosis and the Institución de Protección a la Primera Infancia focused on the health of the working class, working to promote public awareness of health issues. The latter group made education and health care available in working class neighborhoods. Its clinics attempted to provide not only short-term care for children but also to "make them strong physically, giving them a solid base of nutrition, helping them through social aid, which is the most elevated form of human solidarity…"[546] Socialist activism opened the way for one of their own to take on the role of public health inspector. Gabriela Laperriére de Coni provided detailed accounts of working class living conditions in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires. In her reports Laperriére emphasized that the responsibility for improving living conditions lay beyond those that actually endure them, asserting that "we contribute to the high mortality and help it along."[547] Through their efforts and

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[545] Sabrina S. de Romanille, "Informe de la Sociedad Incorporada Obstétrica Nacional," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 4:14, April 1904, p.44. According to de Romanille, these investigations led to the arrest of 27 false midwives, a benefit to "the health of the poor and the rich."

[546] "Lucha contra la tuberculosis," *La Vanguardia*, 17 August 1901; Carolina Muzilli, "Obras e Instituciones de protección a la Primera Infancia," *Humanidad Nueva,* 8:6, 1915, p. 27.

[547] Gabriela L. de Coni, "El trabajo de la mujer y del niño en la fábrica," *La Vanguardia,* 24 August 1901.

their moral outrage, Socialist feminists sought to encourage greater government action in public health.

Feminist groups used their clout in public health matters to influence legislation and promote government oversight and support for medical care, urging the government as well as various private and religious organizations to contribute to improvements in housing designed to promote better hygiene in working class neighborhoods. This involvement represented a shift in priorities for public health policy. During the nineteenth century, government health administration focused on epidemics and disease brought to the country from abroad. In the twentieth century, attention shifted to local conditions conducive to ill health. This focus contained both the effort to improve overall living conditions for the urban population as well as the effort to limit those diseases promoted by vice, such as alcoholism and venereal disease. As we have seen, this concern guided efforts to limit alcohol sales and prostitution, but also prompted additional legislation to prevent the ill effects of these conditions from reaching future generations. Such legislation focused on preventing those afflicted with alcoholism, venereal disease, or other hereditary illnesses from marrying, thus reducing the possibility of perpetuating those diseases. Eugenics theory contributed to these efforts, as legislators attempted to build future generations free of all biological failings.[548]

In the projects presented to the national congress, the concern for the moral as well as the physical health of the nation in general and of women and children. In 1913, Congress awarded a grant of 200,000 pesos to the Juana Manuela Gorriti Association, run by Radical feminist Elvira Rawson de

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[548] Juan Carlos Rebora, *La familia chilena y la familia argentina* (La Plata: Universidad de La Plata, 1938), 140-2; Eduardo A. Zimmerman, *Los liberales reformistas: La cuestión social en la Argentina, 1890-1916* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana Universidad de San Andrés, 1995), 103-17; Gustavo Parra, *Antimodernidad y trabajo social: Origenes y expansión del trabajo social Argentino* (Lujan: Universidad Nacional Lujan, 1999), 118-28.

Dellepiane, in order to create a home for new mothers. In his speech supporting the project, Deputy Carlos Conforti painted a picture of poor mothers abandoned following their deliveries. "To what extremes will misery take them," he asked rhetorically, "when it is a matter of proletarian women?…How many of these women will end up augmenting the demimonde population?" The proposed facility was supposed to double as both a pediatric clinic and as a social services bureau.[549] Subsequent contributions from the national government tended to favor Conservative institutions, particularly the Sociedad de Beneficencia, which had a long relationship with the State. The emphasis on maternal clinics remained throughout these actions, demonstrating a persistent acceptance of motherhood as a national interest that bridged political divisions.[550] Radicals, Socialists, Conservatives, and, later, Peronists, all made maternal care a part of their social aid efforts, once again emphasizing the centrality of motherhood in Argentine feminist discourse.

Beyond the direct collaboration with feminist organizations, the national government also undertook the creation of a larger bureaucratic system to monitor and improve public health. Such efforts became much more prominent in the 1920's and 30's with the reform of the Department of Public Health and creation of related agencies. The Department of Public Health, created in 1891 with power only to combat "invasions of exotic illnesses from overseas," lacked the wherewithal to truly promote a healthy citizenry. The proposed reforms of the 1920s gave the Department the power to oversee health and hygiene in all public areas, including the workplace.[551] Once accomplished, subsequent legislation

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[549] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1913*, v.2, p. 395-6.

[550] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1913,* v. 2, p. 395-98; *Diario de sesiones de 1915*, v.3, p. 511-2, 530-1; *Diario de sesiones de 1922*, v.2, p.745; *Diario de sesiones de 1928,*, v. 3, p. 173-4; *Diario de sesiones de 1938*, v. 2, p. 1087-90; *Diario de sesiones de 1940*, v. 3, p. 527-8; *Diario de sesiones de 1941*, v.4, p.497-500.

[551] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1920*, v. 2, p. 18-22.

refined these duties through agencies designed to target specific health problems. In 1927, Deputy Leopoldo Bard proposed the creation of a Division of Social Hygiene as a new agency under the Department of Public Health. In its first article the proposal cited " the function of government to fight against illnesses and customs likely to cause the degeneration of the race" and in the second article listed syphilis, tuberculosis, venereal disease, alcoholism and prostitution as examples.[552] Subsequent legislation reiterated this argument, culminating in the 1936 law that, as we have seen, banned prostitution as part of a larger effort to combat venereal disease. Other agencies combated tuberculosis and illnesses associated with living conditions, contributing to debates over the welfare of the working class. In all of these debates, feminists contributed their insight and influence.[553]

Feminists also brought their concern with health to the public through education. In this way, they sought to enlist the population in the protection of their own health. Feminists saw the expansion of health education as a necessary outgrowth of modernization that brought with it a host of illnesses that seemed to affect children. They supported the creation of not only clinics but also of "programs of instruction in secondary education" consisting of "notions of infant physiology and hygiene that should constitute the principal focus of every adolescent girl or future mother."[554] Such demands for health education usually reflected an assumption that parents remained ignorant of proper hygiene, and

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[552] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1927*, Tv. 1, p. 622.

[553] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1920*, v.2, p.18-24; *Diario de sesiones de 1927*, v.1, p.622-5; *Diario de sesiones de 1927*, v.4, p.402-20; *Diario de sesiones de 1933*, v.4, p.411-25; *Diario de sesiones 1935*, v.1, p.333-5; *Diario de sesiones de 1936,* v.4, p.924-49; *Diario de sesiones de 1936*, v.3, p.3121-2; *Diario de sesiones de 1936*, v.5, p. 19-45; *Diario de sesiones 1939*, v.5, 20-3; *Diario de sesiones de 1941*, v. 3, p.601-3; *Diario de sesiones de 1941*, v.4, p. 317-9; *Diario de Sesiones de 1942,* v.5, p.942-3.

[554] "Guia práctica para las madres," *Femenil*, 1:2, 21 September 1925, p. 54.

that schools served as the only way to promote public health through teaching. This instruction, however, at times coincided with the more controversial issue of sex education. Feminists, as we have seen, believed that sexual education "is necessary and urgent as a means of social defense against venereal disease and the degeneration of the race." Moral education, whether Catholic or secular, would not be enough to curb dangerous sexual behavior- people had to be aware of the health risks. Given the threat that sexually transmitted diseases posed to families, feminist health care groups often took the initiative in checking the backgrounds of their patients in order to gauge both their physical and moral heritage. Significantly, feminists emphasized male culpability for bringing disease into the home and causing the "failure of maternity" in their wives. Yet women were the targets of feminist education and health care campaigns.[555] Thus the dichotomy of male license and female responsibility reproduced itself in discussions of health- men might be blameworthy, but women were the ones ultimately responsible for the preservation of "the race".

When discussing family health, feminists placed particular emphasis on the care of children. The writings of most feminists at the time emphasized the maternal role and therefore the effort to improve children's health crossed divisions of ideology. Alicia Moreau de Justo, a dedicated feminist, praised the conservative Sociedad de Beneficencia for its work supporting young mothers. However, the divide between the different brands of feminism becomes evident in the measures each demanded. Conservatives took on a milder tone, placing the burden of action on poor women: "if many of the necessary cares are beyond the reach of the poor, because their necessities and rude occupations force them to

[555] "La higiene en la escuela," *El Diario* 8 May 1913; "Liga Argentina de Profilaxis Social," *La Razón,* 10 September 1921; "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa* 11 July 1916; Selma Risler, "La sifilis es la gran destructor de la felicidad familiar," *Vida Femenina,* 3:35, June 193; Carolina Muzilli, "Obras e Instituciones de Protección a la primera infancia," *Humanidad Nueva,* 8:6, 1915, p. 272; Lavrin, *Women, Feminsim, and Social Change*, 102-5.

do without, let them observe those that only depend on their goodwill." Alicia Moreau de Justo, on the other hand, argued that "misery and ignorance" caused poor health, they also reinforced one another. Therefore, one could not simply attack ignorance and expect the desired result. "The solution appears clear," she wrote,

> Suppress the causes that generate these evils; suppress alcoholism and syphilis through instruction and education, that currently only allow men to avoid the fall; suppress the pinched, malignant, and dark atmosphere; suppress poor nutrition…which causes this miserable health.

These reforms, naturally, would involve long-term efforts. In the meantime, socialist feminists called for mothers to have greater access to less physically demanding jobs, to legal protection, and to more health care facilities suited to their needs.[556] Although socialist feminists were the most vocal in calling for such reforms, feminists across the political spectrum accepted the need for greater maternal care.

While feminists relied on publications to convey these arguments to the wider public, medical conferences served as the primary forum among themselves for the articulation of plans to enhance the care available to children and to families. These conferences served to highlight not only the knowledge of female physicians, but also as practical demonstrations of female capacity for organization. These conferences typically brought together men and women from across political lines in the interest of promoting public health. In order to broaden the appeal of health conferences, organizers in the first decade of the twentieth century sometimes attempted to expand their subject beyond children's

[556] Alicia Morea de Justo, "La protección de la madre y el niño no es un problema aislado," *Vida Femenina,* 4:42, Januray 1937, p. 12; "Conferencia de la doctora Dellepiane," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 6:22, June 1906, p. 30-4; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "La educación de los niños débiles y enfermos," *Humanidad Nueva*, v. 5, 1912, p. 37-41; Enrique Monchet, *Humanidad Nueva*, v. 8, January 1915, p. 33-4; Leonor Llach, "Defensa de la maternidad," *Vida femenina,* 2:20, March 1935, p. 7.

health to include "the many infectious illnesses that attack humanity without consideration of age." However, children definitely served as the focus of the most widely attended conference of the 1910's, the National Children's Congress of 1913.[557]

The 1913 conference included a range of topics sufficiently broad to satisfy any desire for inclusiveness. Subjects ranged from hygiene and maternal care to psychology, education and legal status. The participants covered an equally broad ideological spectrum. Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, who in later years formed an independent feminist party, organized the conference. Participants included socialists Alicia Moreau de Justo and Enrique del Valle Iberlucea, anarchist Julio Barcos, and Conservative Leopoldo Lugones. In her program for the congress, Lanteri stated that the participants would "study the child itself and its relations with the state, with society and with the family" in the hope of supporting "norms of conduct that respond to national thought [and] in accord with modern maternity." For Lanteri, there was a clear connection between feminist efforts and the evolution of society.[558]

Subsequent conferences took on a more stridently political tone. In 1916, the declaration of the Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño called on the government to repeal the law of Residence and Law of Social Defense, used to deport labor activists from the country. This international conference, organized once again by Lanteri de Renshaw and attended by Moreau de Justo and the Radical feminist Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, covered similar topics as the 1913 congress. However, this conference received considerably more attention from

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[557] Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 105-12.

[558] Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, "Informe de la presidenta de la comisión de la prensa y propaganda," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 5:20, December 1905, p. 20; "Congreso Nacional del Niño," *El diario*, 7 May 1913, p. 1; Leonida Bartacos "El congreso del niño," *La Escuela Popular*, 1:13, 15 November 1913, p. 6-7; Julieta Lanteri de Renshaw, "Congreso Nacional del Niño," *Boletín Mensual del Museo Social de Argentina*, 2:13-14, 1913, p. 22-5.

the mainstream press, most notably the major daily newspaper *La Prensa*. Feminist views on issues such as temperance, proper child care and the support of working mothers received a far wide audience than they ever had before as a result.[559] Through the vehicle of public health debate, feminists expanded public awareness of female political capacity as well as good hygiene.

Divorce Laws

Feminists consistently emphasized the importance of family as the bedrock of modern society. Those feminists that supported divorce legislation thus faced a serious challenge when they sought to defend their position. Indeed, for feminists of distinct ideologies, this proved to be one of the most divisive subjects. Conservative and Radical feminists tended to be silent at best on the matter; Socialist, Independent and Anarchist feminists favored the idea, though always with reservations. That divorce posed such a challenge to feminism in Argentina is not difficult to understand. On one side, divorce represented freedom- the ability to choose one's marital status represented a fundamental right. Furthermore, the ability to escape a marriage allowed women a protection of last resort for themselves and their children should the husband become abusive. On the other hand, centuries of tradition and Catholic dogma made divorce anathema. In addition, the possibility of legally disbanding the family unit seemed to contradict the exaltation of domesticity that lay at the heart of so many feminist arguments. Divorce projects did come up before Congress. However, given this ambiguity, failure was a virtual certainty.

[559] "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 6 July 1916; "Congresos internacionales del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 7 July 1916; "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 8 July 1916; "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 11 July 1916; "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 12 July 1916; "Congreso del Centenario Americano del Niño," *La Prensa*, 13 July 1916.

As with the battle for prohibition, abolition of prostitution, and the campaign for improvements in public health, feminists linked the case for divorce with that of suffrage. In a 1932 editorial, the newspaper *El Mundo* noted that new projects for suffrage and for divorce had appeared before Congress. Although the editorial acknowledged that the two reforms had little in common on the surface, "both projects contain the same content of social renovation." These proposals "address, in a word, new points of view that the age we live in imposes on us…" thereby framing both suffrage and divorce into a larger argument favoring a vision of modernity.[560] While such a link may have hurt the campaign for political rights by antagonizing social conservatives, some feminists saw divorce as one of the beneficial reforms that the vote would deliver. One article, expressing dismay at the delays facing a divorce project in 1934, cited the case as "another motive for women to agitate public opinion in favor of the deliverance of their political rights." Women, the author argued, "need the vote as an instrument of their liberation," which in this case clearly meant liberation from husbands as well as a more esoteric sense of freedom for women.[561] Such statements demonstrate the close connection of political and social rights for women, amply developed throughout the feminist movement. However, not all feminists embraced this connection with such fervor, particularly in the early years of the movement. Conservative feminists eventually accepted the need for women's voting rights, but would never accept divorce, and even left-wing feminists demonstrated mixed feelings on the matter.

Uncertainty among feminists resulted in part from ambiguity within the legal code itself. Early opinions on divorce emphasized the importance of maintaining family structures for the well-being of children, regarding family love

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[560] "El voto de la mujer," *El Mundo*, 12 May 1932.

[561] "El divorcio y el sufragio femenino," *Vida Femenina*, 2:14, September 1934, p. 3.

as “a duty more than a pleasure.” As a result, absolute divorce- the right to legally separate and remarry- did not form part of the Civil Code. Though the Code did come to include a redefinition of marriage as a civil contract, also made marriage a “special contract” that partners could not dissolve completely. However, the code did allow for legal separation of “bodies and goods,” but not the right to remarry, in cases of adultery or extreme physical abuse. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, official opinion favored the preservation of the family unit, while still recognizing that there were circumstances in which separation was the best course. Children remained the central justification for this state of affairs, based on the belief that a broken home would promote deviance in young men and women. The focus on children also reinforced the assumption that procreation formed the foundation of all marriages- analysts remained silent on childless couples when defending the existing laws. This arrangement might have been less troublesome in Argentina, had Uruguay not enacted a divorce law in 1907. As a result, Argentine couples began to visit the northern republic with the express intent of gaining divorces. These cases proved a challenge to the Argentine legal system, particularly when one of the former spouses remarried. The tendency of the courts to charge such individuals with bigamy may have discouraged proponents of divorce, but the very fact that couples were willing to go to such lengths to dissolve their unions surely demonstrated the demand for similar legislation in Argentina.[562]

Argentine law contributed to the debate in the sense that couples could legally separate, but not remarry. This half-step to full divorce elicited serious criticism. Juan Carlos Rébora declared that after a prolonged personal struggle,

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[562] Santiago Vaca Guzman, *La mujer ante la lei civil, la política i el matrimonio,* (Buenos Aires: Pablo E. Coni 1882), 7; Rodolfo Rivarola, ‘Influencia de la legislación actual en la inmoralidad y el delito, desde la edad infantíl, y bases para una reforma,” *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, September/October 1932, p. 6-7; Cecilia Grierson, “Estudio relativo al estado civil de la mujer argentina,” *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 2:6, June 1902, p. 29; “El divorcio y la ley,” *El Diario*, 21 April 1932; Lavrin, Women, *Feminism, and Social Change*, 228-32 and 241.

he sided with those favoring absolute divorce. The current arrangement, he argued, was arbitrary and contrary to the equal partnership that marriage should be. To deny any separation at all, he continued, would be naïve. Other feminists demonstrated a willingness to accept the notion that a woman should "marry well or in her solitary status utilize her spirit and energy" in order to benefit society and thus avoid the need for divorce. Others sought to distance the issue utterly from notions of morality or social welfare, preferring to view issues of marriage in a purely biological sense. By this logic, the ability to change partners made sense in order to diversify the population.[563] For most feminists, however, the ambiguity remained as the moral issues persisted.

The obstacle of law and tradition represented a particularly daunting challenge for those that wished to make the case for divorce. Enrique Rivarola gave voice to these challenges quite eloquently in a speech to teachers in training. He observed that "within our freedom of worship there is a legitimate preference, founded in our historical antecedents [and] the incontrovertible force of custom" for the teachings of Catholicism, which the government had to uphold under the constitution. Nevertheless, he argued, "nothing prevents putting in motion ideas that will save many trials and tears on the part of the woman, the weaker partner in the conjugal union."[564] Feminists recognized that tradition and moral instruction weighed against them in the effort to allow divorce. Nevertheless, they carried a strong moral certainty that divorce provided a necessary means of escape for women trapped in abusive or unhealthy relationships. The societal tendency to judge female infidelity much more harshly than male and the greater likelihood of women being the victims of abuse made

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[563] Juan Carlos Rébora, *La emancipación de la mujer…*, p. 267-8; Angel Ossorio, *Dialogos Femeninos* (Buenos Aires: Argos, 1947), 36; José A. Mouchet, "El divorcio," *Humanidad nueva*, 6:6 June 1913, p. 305.

[564] Enrique E. Rivarola, "Los derechos de la mujer," *La Razón*, 2 May 1918.

feminist more ready to accept the need for divorce as a refuge.[565] Their pro-divorce arguments tended to fall into one of three categories. Some based the decision to favor divorce on "scientific" or "rationale" observation. Others looked to the experiences of other nations. Finally, hostility to Catholic dogma inspired some feminists to uphold divorce as a positive good.

For feminists, rational analysis contributed strongly to their justifications for divorce. This analysis, tinged with utilitarianism, argued that "all that tends to favor conditions beneficial the development and conservation of life" was "scientifically moral." Therefore, a marriage that placed such development and conservation in doubt could not possibly be moral.[566] Feminists also argued that marriage constitutes a contract like any other. Therefore, there had to be a means for breaking the contract when one or the other party showed just cause. To do otherwise risked injury not only to the partners, but also to their children and to society in general. Allowing for divorce "rid society of false matrimony…of the horror for children of incurable vice and corruption of the parents."[567] A well maintained family life remained the ideal of these feminists, but they recognized that not every marriage produced the desirable results. Pro-divorce feminists believed it was better to provide an opportunity to end unhealthy relationships before they could poison society at large.

The argument that divorce provided a basis for a healthier society certainly found support in the observation that other, "modern" nations had implemented similar laws without creating a breakdown in social order. As with suffrage laws, divorce laws in other nations provided precedents and arguments that Argentine

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[565] José A. Mouchet, "El divorcio," *Humanidad nueva*, 6:6 June 1913, p. 307.

[566] *Ibid.,* p. 306.

[567] Silvio I Ruggieri, "Sintesis de razones favorables a la ley de divorcio," *Vid femenina*, 2:14, 12 September 1934, p. 5; Las mujeres socialistas de Rosario apoyan el proyecto de ley sobre el divorcio," *La Vanguardia,* 17 September 1932.

feminists could wield in their own interest. In his discussion of a 1922 divorce project, Deputy Leopoldo Bard cited various European nations that permitted divorce, and observed that "in modern law, all contracts and associations are temporary and limited, and all institutions, juridical and social, are based on the principle of liberty." Marriage should enjoy a similar basis, he said. The feminist press observed the prevalence of divorce in "modern" nations as well. Were the opponents of divorce correct in their fears, they argued, these nations "would have fallen into debauchery, which happily has not occurred nor will it." Indeed, Argentina risked being left behind in the modern world if it refused to join the ever-growing body of nations that permitted absolute divorce.[568]

In addressing the modernity of divorce, feminist could not evade the stance of the Catholic Church. Moderate feminists took on a more conciliatory tone in response to the religious complications of divorce, while extreme Socialists and Anarchists used divorce as a means to attack the Church. In his speech to the Chamber of Deputies, Leopoldo Bard pointed out that divorce fell under civil authority and did not require anyone to violate their own conscience. Furthermore, he pointed out that even the gospels upheld divorce in certain cases, a view supported by the Orthodox and Lutheran denominations. Rodolfo Rivarola added to this argument that the Catholic Church disapproved of civil unions in any event. Therefore, for the Church to object to civil divorce would lend recognition to a practice it disavowed in the first place. In both cases, these moderate feminists painted the matter as a simple division of Church and State functions.[569] Other feminists took on a more cynical tone towards Church

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[568] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de1922*, v. 1, P. 294-5; "Las mujeres socialistas de Rosario apoyan el proyecto de ley sobre el divorcio," *La Vanguardia*, 17 September 1932; Silvio L. Ruggieri, "Sintesis de razones favorables a la ley del divorcio," *Vida Femenina*, 2:14, 12 September 1934, p. 4.

[569] Congreso Nacional, Camara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1922*, v. 1, P. 293, 6 July 1922; Rodlofo Rivarola, "Un punto de vista sobre el divorcio," *Humanidad Nueva*, 6:12, December 1913, p. 625.

objections, noting that priests took on vows of chastity and were therefore ill equipped to judge what was suitable for married life. Anarchists, on the other hand, were opposed to the idea of marriage in the first place. "Natural law" they argued, "impels us to love constantly, it does not impel us to love the same object equally." "Why," he asked "remain subject to one man or another for all our lives?"[570] The opinions of pro-divorce feminists ran the gamut from reluctant support of divorce to open hostility towards marriage itself. Division among supporters and the strength of the opposition guaranteed lack of progress in advancing the cause of divorce.

The lack of unity that characterized the pro-divorce argument did not trouble those who opposed it. Anti-divorce forces expressed no moral ambiguity about their stance, and the strength of tradition and law clearly favored their point of view. The Catholic Church championed this defense of indissoluble marriage most strongly. Throughout the twentieth century, the Church's stance reflected that of the 1902 Episcopal Conference:

> It is impossible to vote in favor of the measure without a serious denial of conscience for those legislators that still profess the Catholic faith, nor can it be acceptable even for the others, whatever their faith may be, that wish to do no harm to the laws, public customs, and the religious, social and political structure of the Argentine people through this legislation.

The Catholic press reiterated these sentiments, calling on its readers to use the "powerful dike of public opinion" in defense of the "noble virtues of a perfect religion and a most pious tradition" of holy matrimony that formed the foundation

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[570] "Las mujeres socialistas de Rosario apoyan el proyecto de ley sobre el divorcio," *La Vanguardia*, 17 September 1932; Pepina Guerra, "¿Amamos? No, ¡Luchemos!" *La Voz de la Mujer*, 1:2, 31 January 1896 in *La Voz de la Mujer: periódico comunista-anarquico* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1997), 62-3.

of society.[571] The mainstream press seemed to accept these arguments, declaring that "marriage is always the only solid basis for society." Conservative feminists provided some of the most telling arguments against the notion of divorce. Some embraced the belief that "the family is a natural organism" whose unity and harmony formed the basis for all human development. On a more practical level, Conservatives demonstrated, through polls and organized action, that most Argentine women did not want divorce to be legal. They argued that divorce would make it that much easier for men to abandon their families, thus refuting the feminist argument that divorce would provide a way for women to escape unhealthy relationships.[572]

The fundamental division among feminists, in itself, may suffice to explain the failure of divorce laws, but undoubtedly the ambiguity expressed by feminists as a whole also did damage to its progress. Conservative feminists had little difficulty in mobilizing public opinion against what they saw as a threat to the very foundations of society. Socialist, Radical, and Anarchist feminists, on the other hand, had to struggle against tradition, strong moral arguments, and their own consciences when making the case for divorce. Although projects in favor of the idea appeared almost as often as suffrage projects, divorce made little headway in Argentina. Only towards the end of Perón's regime, in the context of a power struggle centered on the Catholic Church, did government take definitive action on the matter.

The International Peace Movement

[571] Auza, ed. *Documentos del Episcopado Argentino, 1889-1909*, v. 1 (Buenos Aires: 1943) 48; "Divorcio: Despacho de la mayoría," *La Voz de la Iglesia*, 28 June 1902.

[572] "El divorcio y el domicilio," *La Nación*, 16 September 1932; "Algunas deneralidades sobre el divorcio," *La Mujer y la Casa*, no. 3, December 1919, p. 6; "El feminismo en la Argentina," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, May/June 1933, p. 9; Marcel Prévost, "El problema del divorcio" *Atlantida*, 27 July 1922.

In the first half of the twentieth century, feminists tended to focus on domestic issues in their efforts to shape public policy. Although they looked abroad for inspiration in their efforts, the realm of foreign policy remained largely outside of their campaign. However, there was one major exception to this trend. Feminists in Argentina expressed a strong interest in the international peace movement, and called on the government to uphold its ideals. The basis for these efforts came from much the same source as their domestic policy issues-concern for family, the advancement of a progressive ideal of society, and the desire to enhance the presence of women in the public sphere. However, attention on this issue tended to be episodic, usually peaking during times of international crisis. Turn-of-the-century violence involving Chile and Uruguay, the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and World War II, and the onset of the Cold War all provoked the interest of feminists, but in the years in between these conflicts feminists turned their attention towards other matters. Concern for peace clearly fell within the limits of feminism these women set for themselves, but it only became a priority in times of immediate need.

The peace movement in Argentina, like the suffrage movement, originated with contacts in Europe. There, "principal statesman" had begun efforts to "diminish or eliminate [war's] effect" which had been "the most terrible plague that ever afflicted civilized nations."[573] In the case of Argentina, this desire for peace first became a priority for feminists during a border dispute with its western neighbor. During the dispute, Gabriela Laperriére de Coni participated in a medical conference in Santiago. She held a special panel at the conference during which she "energetically condemned the militaristic tendencies that perturb the calm and the economies of the two peoples." Her solution was the

[573] "El militarismo argentino y las economias del presupuesto," *La Vanguardia*, 8 July 1899.

creation of an international women's league "designed to work tirelessly for South American peace and disarmament."[574] While Chile and Argentina eventually settled the matter diplomatically, the concern of feminists for peace remained. In subsequent years, the Conservative Consejo Nacional de Mujeres called on the Uruguayan government to resolve an internal political conflict peacefully, and articles appeared in Socialist journals extolling the virtues of pacifism and decrying the wastefulness of war.[575] It was not until the onset of World War I, however, that feminist interest in promoting world peace truly hit its stride.

As the war in Europe began in August of 1914, Argentine feminists observed the unfolding violence, and made their opinions on the conflict known, calling for a quick end. Their understanding of the war and its causes differed according to ideology, but all feminists agreed that female activism and international cooperation held the answers for avoiding war in the future. The Consejo Nacional de Mujeres, for example, called on women "to affiliate with the pacifist movement, that seems to float like a vision of good from the cupola of the Vatican" and sent members to participate in peace conferences in Europe. At the same time, they urged the Argentine government to remain neutral in the conflict so that "America will not be consumed in this the devastating flames of this colossal conflagration."[576] Conservative feminists, as might be expected, looked

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[574] "En Chile," *La Vanguardia*, 2 February 1901. For the border dispute, see "Ecos del dia, nuestra diplomacia: ¿Adonde vamos?" *El Diario*, 19 October 1900; "Fraternidad internacional Argentino-Chileno" *La Vanguardia*, 23 February 1901; "Contra el militarismo: los consrciptos," *La Vanguardia*, 9 March 1901; "En favor de la paz," *La Vanguardia,* 14 December 1901; "Ecos: el problema chileno-argentino" *Tribuna*, 24 February 1902.

[575] "Notas cambiados entre el Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* 4:14, April 1904, p. 9-14; Berta de Suttner, "¡Abajo las armas!" *Humanidad Nueva*, 3:12, 31 December 1910, p. 534; J. Novicow, "La guerra y sus pretendidos beneficios," *Humanidad Nueva,* 3:12, December 1910, p. 539.

[576] "Informe de la Presidenta de la comisión de la prensa y propaganda," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*,15:54, June 1915, p. 12; "Informe de la secretaria del exterior," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 15:54, June 1915, p. 9; Elia M. Martínez, "Informe de la Presidenta

to the Church and the State for the solutions to the crisis of war, placing on them the burden of avoiding future conflicts.

Socialist women moved beyond the solutions of Conservative feminists, envisioning international institutions and broader participation for women. These feminists argued that "pacifism and socialism are more in accord with the spirit of Jesus Christ than are capitalism and patriotism." Women should therefore work towards "solidarity" and against "isolation." Furthermore, since individual nations were inherently incapable of abiding by their own arrangements, a "confederation of peoples" needed to take charge in order to impose peace. In their view, the greed of capitalists had provoked the war. Now that it was underway, "indignation is silenced and protest is muted in the face of the interests of creed, commercial interests, political interests and the interests of party and class."[577] As leaders in the struggle for a better society and in their capacity as mothers, women sought to play an instrumental role in counteracting these bellicose tendencies. Through their moral influence and their strong presence in education, women could promote peace and emphasize its necessity to future generations, diminishing the probability of future wars. Women, as those who provided the young men who fought and died in wars, had a strong motive to bring their influence to bear on this matter, as well as a means to do so. The desire for peace even contributed to the gathering arguments in favor of the vote- with suffrage, women could more readily affect foreign policy. "The day that women share with men control of government and foreign policy," wrote one feminist, "is the day that war will die as a means to end human differences." While subsequent events disproved this optimistic assessment, the peace

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de la comisión de la prensa y propaganda," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 17:60-2, November 1917, p. 46.

[577] Elena Key, "El problema de la paz," *Humanidad Nueva*, 7:11, November 1914 p. 518-24; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El año trágico," *Humanidad Nueva*, 8:7, July 1915, p. 326-7.

movement still provided both another opportunity for and justification of the suffrage movement and female political activism.[578]

In the years following the First World War, enthusiasm for the peace movement in Argentina cooled, but by no means dissipated. In the 1920's, feminists cheered the growth of the League of Nations and international arbitration. They particularly rejoiced that "women, through their temperance, natural sensibility, through her greater suffering in time of war, are that one that has latched onto this idea with greatest enthusiasm."[579] In the 1930's, women's support of peace efforts continued through educational efforts, such as the move to eliminate "images of war and the old, traditional, exaltation of the blood-drenched hero." This effort brought together feminists from across the ideological spectrum. Meanwhile, feminists refined their arguments about war to include nationalism as an important cause in conflicts, and even calling on women to boycott childbearing in order to prevent future generations from being sacrificed to war.[580] However, the onset of the civil war in Spain prompted a

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[578] Elena Key, "El problema de la paz," *Humanidad Nueva*, 7:12, December 1914, p. 593; Elena Key, "El problema de la paz," *Humanidad Nueva*, 8:1, January 1915, p. 2-4; "Encuesta de Humandiad Nueva: Opinión de la Sra Fenia Chetcoff Repetto," *Humanidad Nueva*, 9:2, February 1916, p. 71; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "El maestro y la guerra," *Humanidad Nueva*, v. 9, 1916, p. 170-1; Olive Schreiner, "La mujer y la guerra," *Humanidad Nueva*, v. 9, 1916, p. 81, 127-9.

[579] Rosario N. de Doncel, "Proyecto sobre la paz y arbitraje," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 23:85-6, November 1924, p. 59. See also "Asamblea pro paz, celebrada el 10 de septiembre de 1925 por el Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 27:96-7, March 1927, p. 12; Rosario N. de Doncel, "Informe de la comisión de paz y arbitraje del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*, 27:96-7, March 1927, p. 79.

[580] Marie Hollebecque, "La mujer y el niño ante el problema de la paz," *La Nación,* 12 May 1932; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Opiniones sobre la guerra," *Vida Femenina*, 3:27, October 1935, p. 4; Nicolás Repetto, "Los distintos caminos que conducen a la guerra," *Vida Femenina*, 2:16, November 1934, p. 16. See also "Madres," *Bandera negra*, 1 August 1930, p. 4; "Consejo Nacional de Mujeres- nota pasada a la comisión pro-desarme," *Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* March-April 1932, p. 3; "Circulo argenitno pro-paz," *Boletín mensual del Asociación Cristiana Femenina*, March 1933, p. 5; "Por los senderos de la paz," *Vida Femenina,* 2:16, November 1934, p. 7; "La cooperación y la paz," *Vida Femenina,* 2:24, July 1935, p. 3; "La mujer contra la guerra y contra la explotación," *Vida Femenina,* 2:21, April 1935, p. 3.

renewed interest in the study and prevention of war, but also accentuated ideological divisions among women.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-39), became an especially emotional issue for leftist feminists, especially the Socialists, as the forces of the Republic lost ground to fascist leader General Francisco Franco. This war provoked not only a renewed interest in the peace movement, but also efforts to provide humanitarian relief for the women and children victimized by the war in Spain. The controversy the civil war elicited manifested itself in the breakdown of the Conferencia Argentina de Mujeres por la Paz in 1936. This conference brought together women from a variety of organizations for the purpose of discussing the causes of war and how to prevent it. However, early on in the proceedings, the president of the conference, Adela di Carlo, acting on her feelings "as an Argentine and a Christian" called for the conference to end because of the participation of the Women's Anti-war Association, an affiliate of the Communist Party. "I repudiate with all my heart," she declared, "the extremist tendencies that work against our nationality and all ideologies that, in any sense, compromised order and established discipline."[581] Despite this denunciation, the conference continued, but the tension this confrontation cast a pall over the proceedings.[582] Less than a month later, Alicia Moreau de Justo organized a separate leftist peace conference, the Popular Peace Conference of America that reiterated many of the same points as the previous meeting, but which included a more select group of feminists. In addition, this second conference renewed the appeal for the

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[581] "Clausura del local del Conferencia Argentina de Mujeres por la paz," *La Nación,* 8 November 1936.

[582] "Conferencia Argentina de Mujeres por la Paz," *La Nación,* 7 November 1936; "En la Confederación Femenina Argentina," *La Nación,* 8 November 1936; "L a Confederación Femenina Argentina," *La Nación,* 9 November 1936; "Celebró reunión la Conferencia Argentina de Mujeres por la Paz," *La Nación*, 10 November 1936; "Conferencia Argentina de Mujeres por la Paz," *La Nación,* 11 November 1936.

nations of South America to grant women the vote in order to maintain the Americas as a refuge from war and also saluted the Spanish Republic as the legitimate government of that nation.[583] In the following years, the Socialists continued to criticize capitalism and imperialism as the causes of war, and called on women to work hard to prevent the coming catastrophe.[584]

At the same time Socialist feminists decried the growing militarism of the world, they also demonstrated strong support of the Republican cause in Spain and an open hostility to fascism that belied their pacifist orientation. "Every drop of blood," wrote the editors of *Vida Femenina* in a call for donations to Spain, "brings us closer to the goal of fraternity." These feminists argued that the defenders of the Spanish Republic fought to protect the liberty of all nations and required the support of women of Argentina. Events such as the fascist bombing of Guérnica in 1937 reinforced the need to "save the children, save human dignity" and thus to combat fascism.[585] This campaign continued after the end of the civil war itself, leading to efforts to support the allied cause during World War

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[583] "Fue inaugurada la Conferencia popular de Paz," *La Nación*, 23 November 1936; "Continuó deliberando la Conferencia Popular por la Paz," *La Nación*, 24 November 1936; "Terminó ayer su labor la Conferencia Popular por la paz de America," *La Nación,* 26 November 1936.

[584] María Rosa Oliver, "Preparación moral del la guerra," *¡Mujeres!*, 1:2, May 1937, p. 6-7; "La guerra y la mujer obrera," *La Vanguardia*, 18 December 1936; "Conferencia Popular por la Paz de America: despachos," *Vida Femnina*, 4:41, December 1936; "Democracia y paz," *Vida Femnina*, 4:41, December 1936, p. 31; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "América y el problema de paz," *Vida Femenina*, 4:40, November 1936, p. 24-5; Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Si quieres la paz preparate impara el hombre," *Vida Femenina*, 6:71, June 1939, p. 4; María Luisa Blanco," *Vida Femenina,* 6:72, July 1929, p.17-8.

[585] "Vida femenina pide," *Vida Femenina,* 4:39, October 1936, p. 3; "Celebró dos sesiones la Conferencia Popular por la Paz de América," *La Nación*, 25 November 1936,; "Federación Montsey dirige un llamado en nombre de SIA a todas las mujeres de América," *Acción Libertaria*, 4:31, April 1938, p. 1; "Unificación de agrupaciones femeninas que trabajan para España," *¡Mujeres!*, 1:2, May 1937, p. 6; M. Vera, "Trabajan por España, ¿Y tú, mujer, donde trabajas?" *¡Mujeres!*, 1:2, May 1937, p.5; "Agrupación Femenina Antiguerrera," *¡Mujeres!*, 1:2, May 1937, p. 1.

II (the capitalist allies being preferable to the fascist Axis).[586] However, the division among women based on ideology did not disappear after that conflict, and continued to affect the peace movement during the first years of the cold war. While peace remained the stated desire of feminists throughout this period, the global clash of ideologies polarized the different organizations, making cooperation impossible.

Conclusion

As the suffrage movement evolved in Argentina, feminists simultaneously developed a package of reforms that they intended to implement along with their voting rights. While they did not hesitate to advance these reforms before they obtained the vote, they nevertheless expressed confidence that political rights would guarantee the advancement of these various causes and vice versa. Like the vote itself, however, the social reforms outlined above did not always enjoy universal agreement among feminists, nor did each program receive equally enthusiastic support from the different feminist ideologies. Nevertheless, the arguments used to advance these programs, regardless of particular ideology, made use of many of the same tropes found in the case for suffrage. The centrality of domesticity, the use of foreign examples and arguments, and inherent morality of women all reinforced feminist arguments for a variety of reforms. In this fashion, feminists created a mutually reinforcing package of reforms- success in any one area represented a victory for the feminist movement as a whole, justifying women's participation in public discourse and

[586] "Llamando a las mujeres Argentinas," *Vida Femenina*, 7:80, June 1940, p. 20; Angel Ossorio, *Diálogo femenino*, (Buenos Aires: Argos, 1947), 211-2; "El lunes 25 partirá para Francia la Dra. Alicia Moreau de Justo," *La Vanguardia*, 19 August 1947; Elena Dulesky, "¡Así no se defiende la paz!" *Mujeres Argentinas,* no. 38, 1 February 1947, p.2; "Mujeres, madres," *Mujeres Argentinas,* no. 41, 15 March 1947, p. 6; Victoria Ocampo, "La mujer y el voto," *La Vanguardia*, 11 September 1945.

underscoring the validity of claims on political rights. At the same time, as the desired reforms gained wider acceptance, women could claim that their participation was necessary to guarantee their success. Finally, women's participation in debates related to these reforms provided an opportunity for further organization and, therefore, new opportunities for women to participate in political actions.

The issues that feminists chose to emphasize reflected their own particular interests as well as their focus on family issues. The elimination of alcohol and gambling from society found its basis in larger concerns for public health and morality, especially within the family unit. Feminists emphasized the negative impact alcohol could have on women and children in order to justify its restriction. The campaign against legal prostitution had similar roots, as the potential of venereal disease to ruin the very possibility of creating a family made itself apparent. Public health in general provided an easy transition from professional development to public policymaking, as many feminists used their medical training to inform political debates and government policy on health care. Divorce laws and the peace movement, in contrast, provoked considerable ideological divisions among feminists. Divorce struck at the very core of the domestic ideology most feminists professed. Those that supported it found themselves obstructed by centuries of law and tradition and ultimately found it impossible to uphold full divorce as a defense mechanism for women. The peace movement, while appealing in its broad ideology, faced practical limitations in the face of divisions over global ideological competition. The increasingly polarized international situation made unity among Argentina feminists nearly impossible, though again demonstrating the ability of feminists to organize and make their views heard. The government of Juan Perón adopted many of the causes that feminists had advocated, and the division among feminists made it

easier for him and his wife Evita to make their own version of feminism the dominant perspective on women's rights.

Illustration 9- Gabriela Laperriére de Coni. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 10- The Mujeres por la Paz, 1936. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Chapter VIII
The Rise of Peronism and a "New" Feminism, 1943-1947

> To recognize the political rights of women constitutes an act of justice, because the experience of all peoples has demonstrated that when confronted with grave circumstances in which the very life of the nation is at risk, women cooperate wholeheartedly and with no less energy than men in defense of collective rights and interests.
>
> -Juan Perón[587]

> It's true that the idea of recognizing women's political rights floated in the air….[But] it was necessary for the revolution of June 4 to produce them, but even so, the longed-for hour of justice would have been further delayed had not Eva Perón taken in her hands the banner of the political vindication of Argentine women…
>
> -Jerónimo Peralta[588]

On 23 September 1947 Peronists gathered in the Plaza de Mayo to celebrate the enactment of Law 13.010, which had passed the House of Deputies unanimously earlier that same month after extended debate.[589] The law gave women throughout Argentina the right to vote, though it also excepted them from the mandatory military service required of male voters.[590] The gathering, which Peronist sources placed at 500,000, consisted mainly of "women of the most diverse social classes", but some men "of all ages" also accompanied the women

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[587] *La mujer ya puede votar* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950), 4.

[588] Jeronimo Peralta, *Semblanza heróica de Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: SEMCA, 1950), 48.

[589] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesiones de 1947*, v. 4, 252. The House of Deputies unanimously passed the Senate version of the bill in principle, but there was division over the final approval of the individual articles.

[590] *La mujer ya puede votar*, 8.

to share in their "civic desires" and to "participate in this celebration of the Argentine woman."[591]

During the debates, politicians from all parties acknowledged the benefits that their candidates could acquire for supporting suffrage, yet they rejected this as a motive for passing the law. Radical deputy Reynaldo Pastor of San Luís province, for example, noted his party's long support for women's suffrage. He asserted that his colleagues would support the law "in homage to the Argentine woman and as clear proof that we are capable of sustaining an idea and fight for its realization even against our own political interests."[592] Peronist delegate Oscar Albrieu of La Rioja stated that his party supported the law "without electoral calculations" but rather "with the tranquility of paying a republican debt" and "with the security that the women of Argentina will continue as the ones…who forged a nation with their tears, with their sacrifices and with their example of hard work and heroism."[593] These remarks belied the efforts of different parties to claim the credit for this new law.

The Socialists made a point of reminding the public of their long-standing commitment to women's suffrage. At a party meeting in July of 1945, they issued a statement pointing out that "half a century ago the Socialist party initiated the civic education of women, accepting them into its ranks under equal circumstances with men." Furthermore, they recalled the successful Socialist campaign for women's civil rights as well as earlier suffrage proposals in

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[591] *La mujer ya puede votar*, 6-7. The publication lists the type of women included in the catch all phrase "women of the most diverse social classes": factory workers, domestic and office workers, housewives, students, and professional women (in that order). Women of the upper class are conspicuous by their absence in this list.

[592] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesiones de 1947*, v. 4, 232.

[593] *Ibid.*.

Congress.[594] The Socialists repeated these claims throughout the period leading up to the law's passage. They said that there was "no doubt at all that that it is in the Socialist party that these future citizens will have the opportunity to fight successfully…for legislation that protects their rights."[595] Nicolas Repetto, while celebrating the suffrage law and its origins in earlier Socialist projects, nevertheless realized that "in the first few experiments with suffrage Socialists will not be the one's most favored by female votes."[596] This Socialist acceptance of the political realities of Perón's predominance, while perhaps tinged with bitterness, reflected the old belief that women would reward with their votes the party that granted suffrage.

Later events would bear out the predictions of Peronist success with women voters, but Perón's advisers did not take this for granted. At the rally celebrating the creation of new voters, the speakers made it clear whom the women of the nation should thank for their new rights. They reminded them of their place in society. Juan Perón told his listeners that women must "have healthy children and raise virtuous men, who know how to sacrifice and fight for the true interests of the nation."[597] Taking her turn, Evita excoriated those members of congress who followed orders "contrary to the interests of the homeland," meaning those congressmen who opposed Perón and who had slowed passage of the law. "Nothing could withstand the decisiveness, the tenacity, the firm resolution of a people like ours, who on the 17th of October, with

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[594] "En un mensaje las socialistas auspician una unión política," *La Prensa,* 3 July 1945. Despite this assertion of the importance of women in the party, the only female participant of the meeting was Alicia Moreau de Justo.

[595] "La mujer tiene su puesto de lucha en el partido socialista," *La Vanguardia,* 27 August, 1946.

[596] Nicolas Repetto, *Como orientar el voto de la mujer* (Buenos Aires: n.p. 1948), 3-5.

[597] *La mujer ya puede votar,* 16.

Colonel Perón at the front, entered into its historic destiny" she declared.[598] But it was Interior Minister Borlenghi who most clearly stated who should be thanked for the new law. He presented the text of the law to Evita. "If the law that gave the secret and obligatory ballot to men is called the Sáenz Peña law, for its patron," he said, "this should be called…the Evita law."[599] In the late 1940's and early 1950's, most Argentines agreed with these sentiments.

In some respects, the arguments made during the rally did not differ greatly from the attitudes expressed during the decades of the suffrage campaign. Suffragists embraced the domestic role of women as an essential ingredient to a better society, as we have seen. They also made use of women's historical role as caretakers to justify suffrage as a necessity. Why, then, was there such a great division between the earlier suffragists and the peronistas? One important cause lies in party politics. The suffragists had opposed Perón along with their colleagues in the Socialist and Radical parties, therefore the suffragists served as one more target for Peronist antagonism. Another aspect of this antagonism originates in the socioeconomic gap between peronistas and suffragists. Perón made a clear distinction between his friends (the *descamisados*) and enemies (the "oligarchs"), with the suffragists included among the latter group, thus limiting the ability of early feminists and peronistas to make common cause. This social gap between suffragists and many of the women they sought to assist had hindered the feminist movement since its inception. The contradictory image of progress the two sides envisioned proved

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[598] *Ibid.,* 10.

[599] Estela dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1989), 22. The Sáenz Peña law of 1912, named after then president Roque Sáenz Peña, instituted the secret ballot, as well as making the vote obligatory. It is widely regarded as one of the most important political reform laws passed in Argentine history. See David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1987), 189.

even more decisive in determining their political success. Suffragists, while cognizant of the need to win approval from the male-controlled State for their projects, ultimately sought to use female political activism as a tool to reform politics and government. The peronistas desired the exact opposite. They wished to use politics and government to re-shape women into their own image, and suffrage was a means to that end. Ultimately, the peronista's political clout among the working class allowed its agenda to dominate the feminist movement, much as it dominated other aspects of Argentina's political landscape.

The Origins of Peronist Feminism

Perón's adoption of the suffrage cause fit in neatly with his efforts to expand his power base. Well before his rise to the presidency, Perón had made efforts to include women's suffrage as part of his own program. The socialists and Radical advocates of women's voting rights, therefore, found themselves in the uncomfortable position of choosing between rejecting suffrage in order to block their chief antagonist or accepting the final achievement of their goal while watching their rival score a major political victory.[600] Most suffragists did not hesitate to put their antagonism to Perón first, a decision that did not endear them to the majority of women voters, particularly in the working class. Ultimately, Perón's efforts on behalf of the working class proved more compelling than the middle-class suffragists' long years of campaigning.

Perón's experiences as a military officer largely guided the political philosophy, which came to be called *justicialismo*, that provided the blueprint for

[600] Julia Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón y el invisible rol políticofememnino en el peronismo, 1946-52* (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, 1986),17. However uncertain they were about how to respond to Perón's efforts, there was no doubt in the minds of the old suffragists that Perón's interest in women's suffrage was purely a matter of political self-interest.

his initial policies and later administration. These experiences included an extended visit to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as a military attaché during the 1930's. Perón came to place heavy emphasis on the value of order and structure, with a definite chain-of-command. This organization, however, did not remain limited to the government or the military alone, but extended to the whole of society. "History advises the State to prepare itself for its defense," Perón wrote, "and to do so using every last bit of physical, intellectual, and material energy." Perón further asserted that, in the modern world, not only governments and armies but all citizens had to concern themselves with war. "The integral preparation of the country includes the living forces and actions of the nation, in the sense of its physical, intellectual, material, moral and other aspects," he said.[601] Therefore, to govern meant coordinating vast material resources in coordination with unifying and commanding a large population. It also meant having the power and the authority to reach into every aspect of daily life in order to accomodate the activity of citizens towards the goals of the State. This theme of unity became the central pillar of Peronism and the populist regime it created.[602]

The success of populism in Argentina, as in much of Latin America, capped years of economic and political activity based on industrial development. Labor union membership saw a steady rise before Perón first entered the government in 1943, by which time twenty percent of all workers had been organized, mainly in the transport and service sector.[603] Most organized laborers

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[601] Juan Perón, *Apuntes de historia militar: parte teorica* (Buenos Aires: Circulo Militar, 1934), 134-9.

[602] See Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), for a further interpretation of Perón's political ideology.

[603] Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 8; Angel Perelman *Como hicimos el 17 de Octubre* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Coyoacán, 1961), 43.

belonged to one of the two branches of the General Labor Confederation- C.G.T 1 and C.G.T 2, organized by the socialists and communists. These organizations focused on winning higher wages, which were still quite low despite rising employment.[604] In those days, as one labor leader recalled, workers were obliged to "hope that one day a star like that of Bethlehem would light the way to our freedom."[605] For many workers, Perón became that star, because he utilized his position as Secretary of Labor to improve conditions and settle disputes in their favor.

Perón took charge of the Secretariat of Labor and Prevision following the coup of June 4, 1943. Led by a group of army officers known by the acronym GOU (generally believed to signify "United Officers Group") this coup toppled the sitting government with ease. They had been aided by the unpopularity of continued corruption in the government and the displeasure of the allies who resented Argentina's unwillingness to declare war on Germany. The secretariat, though a sub-ministerial agency, nevertheless held tremendous potential to affect the lives of Argentine workers. Under the new military government, the secretary had the authority to "defend the worker and improve his labor and living conditions, to promote his access to private property, increase production in all its forms and stimulate effective collaboration among all social sectors."[606] Perón made it clear that he intended to use this authority to promote stability and wellbeing in the workplace. All conflict in the workplace, he argued, not only affected the economy but also "destroyed the balance of social harmony, so necessary for any process of progressive evolution." Mutual respect in factories

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[604] Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, 117-8.

[605] Cipriano Reyes, *Yo hice el 17 de octubre* (Buenos Aires: G.S Editorial, 1973), 51.

[606] República Argentina, *Leyes nacionales: Año 1946,* v. 3 (Buenos Aires: Secretaia del Senado de la Nación, 1947), 2. Reference pertains to decree 15.074, article 5, issued in 1943.

and workshops, he asserted, were essential to maintaining the desired peace.[607] In practice, this ideal usually meant Perón supported unions in their demands- thus promoting confidence among laborers and promoting growth in union membership. However, this support came with a price. Only those unions that backed Perón politically would receive the benefits of his policies- all other unions were "asphyxiated" as the opposition described it.[608] Nevertheless, the unions that chose cooperation experienced tremendous gains under Peronism. Under Perón's "patronage" union membership soared to more than 42 percent of all workers in 1954, with manufacturing now carrying the bulk of the members.[609] Given the benefits he delivered to most workers, it is not difficult to understand why so many Argentines favored Peronism.

Perón neglected neither women workers nor working-class wives as he built his alliance with organized labor. As we have seen, many politicians, activists, and labor leaders had viewed the presence of women in the workplace to be problematic, even dangerous. They saw female workers as competitors for jobs that reduced wages. Perón's response to the growing female workforce was to form an agency designed to address the issues of female labor. In October 1944, he created the Division of Work and Assistance for Women (DTAM), designed to improve on existing protective legislation and "to increase

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[607] Juan Domingo Perón, *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Proyecto Hernandarias, 1985), 117 and 121.

[608] *La Confederación General de Trabajo de la Argentina al servicio de Perón: informe emitado por la delegación obrera norteamerican sobre las condiciones en que se desenvuleve el gremialismo argentino* (Buenos Aires: n.p, 1949), 1. The ability of the government to become involved in union affairs derived from a decree of the military government- only approved unions could operate. Ironically, this report of the U.S labor delegation came from a visit by union delegates invited by the Perón regime to observe labor activity in the nation.

[609] James, *Resistance and Integration,* 9-10. From 1946 to 1951 alone, total union membership rose from 520,000 to 2,334,000. Female membership also increased in this period, as unions began to accept them as members.

their wellbeing and perfect their culture."[610] During the inauguration ceremonies for the DTAM, Perón revealed his vision for women in society. "Dignifying women morally and materially equals energizing the family. To energize the family is to fortify the nation" he announced. In order to achieve this end, he suggested that a "superior organization" needed to create order and balance in society. Perón also called for "special legislation" designed to protect and support female labor.[611] This coincided with the demands of earlier feminists, who believed that there were distinctions to be made between male and female workers and who emphasized protection rather than equality.

However, the specific forms that this protection could take included substantially progressive policies. For example, Perón supported the principle of equal pay for equal work. He did not endorse this measure, which had also been a cherished goal of the suffragists, out of a sense of justice for women, but rather as a means for supporting male labor. "The inferior salaries of women can become a factor of exploitation and disloyal competition for men," he stated, that would lower salaries in general and thus disrupt the economy.[612] The creation of the DTAM also held the promise of improved daycare facilities, again as a means to enhance productivity. In the words of the DTAM's chairwoman, if female workers felt that their children were in good hands, managers could be certain that "these mothers will demonstrate the dedication in their work that comes with gratitude."[613] This pro-feminist rhetoric did not necessarily translate into concrete

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[610] "Cronica economica: costo de la vida, trabajo y salarios," *Revista de economía y estadistica*, 6:3, 1944, p. 195.

[611] Juan Domingo Perón, *El pueblo quiere saber de qué se trata* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1944), 224.

[612] *Ibid.,* 225.

[613] "Va en ayuda de la mujer que trabaja un nuevo organismo," *La Nación,* 4 October 1944. Gregorio Lavie also mentioned that the DTAM would provide instruction in domestic economics, another function it held in common with other feminist groups.

reforms. While the Division of Work and Assistance for Women did provide an opportunity for women workers to voice their concerns, it was unable to implement fully the desired improvements in their labor conditions. Nevertheless, Perón's willingness to include women in his pro-labor activities demonstrated his desire to make women a part of his political machine.[614]

Judging from the testimony of women Peronists, Perón did not court female workers as aggressively as he did their male counterparts. Women workers tended to learn through their relatives or co-workers that "there was a young colonel who had held some very interesting meetings between workers and owners." For the purposes of Perón's political agenda, these contacts were sufficient to plant the image in women's minds that "he was a very intelligent man, distinguished by his goodness, by his good qualities as a man." Workers of both sexes noticed when managers "no longer treated us like an animal, like a piece of furniture, like something that you use." Women could now "enter the plants with a certain cockiness, a certain pride" that came from the knowledge that "in Trabajo and Provisión there is a man we can rely on to defend us." Nevertheless, women workers still proved reluctant to become politically active on their own. Even those that did become active in organized labor at this time did so with the permission of their husbands.[615] While female Peronist organizations had not yet become fully developed, Perón in 1944 clearly intended to extend his base of popular support into this relatively new area.

Following the creation of the DTAM, Perón expanded his political interest in women to include support for suffrage; early in 1945, he created the Pro-women's Suffrage Commission under the Division of Work and Assistance for

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[614] Blanca Stabile, *La mujer en el desarrollo nacional* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Arayú, 1961), 16-7; Maryssa Navarro, *Evita* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1981), 181.

[615] Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1988), 27-8; James, *Doña María's Story,* 48-9 and 216.

Women. Later that same year, having accepted the position of Vice President of the military government, he prepared to remove all legal barriers to women's suffrage and officially allow women to participate in the elections scheduled for 1946. The DTAM and the Pro-women's Suffrage Commission sponsored a meeting to showcase support for this proposal. Those in attendance included representatives of several women's groups, labor unions with substantial female membership such as the telephone workers, and perhaps most significantly, Carmela Horne de Burmeister on behalf of the Argentine Women's suffrage association, which still enjoyed a large membership. All of these groups provided a ringing endorsement for the government's plan. Perón thanked them for their support and promised to work "tirelessly to bring about this beautiful initiative."[616] Such a statement left little room for doubt as to his intentions, making it appear as though suffrage was now a question of timing rather than a mere possibility.[617]

While a few suffragists supported Perón, the majority objected to the colonel's involvement in voting issues. Initially, they based these objections on the illegitimacy of the military government, arguing that voting rights granted by a dictatorship would be tainted. The socialist feminists took the lead in this campaign, joining their male colleagues in their public denunciations of the 1943 coup. The Socialists made their views plain, describing the GOU as inclined towards totalitarianism. In an almost prophetic passage, one editorial in *La Vanguardia* argued that, under such a regime, "little by little the vague and inconsistent guiding principles go by the wayside and events begin to turn not

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[616] "Una declaración sobre otorgamiento del voto femenino," *La Nación,* 26 July, 1945; Juan Domingo Perón, *El pueblo ya sabe de qué se trata* (Buenos Aires: n.p, 1946), 123.

[617] A further boost to the GOU government's credibility on this issue came with the Chapultepec conference of March, 1947. This conference reaffirmed the commitment to women's rights expressed in the earlier International American Conferences and that suffrage represented an act of "elemental human justice." See Senado de la Nación, *Aprobación del acta de Chapultepec y Carta de las Naciones Unidas* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1946), 64-5.

towards ideas or plans, but towards men" who would bend the nation to their ambition.[618] Perón's meeting with feminists friendly to his policies sent a clear signal to the socialists and others who opposed Perón: his ambitions included women. In an article for *Anuario socialista,*, one socialist feminist accused those who had attended the meeting of being "collaborationists." She rejected their claims to legitimately represent women.[619] Perón's promise of support for women's suffrage, far from encouraging socialist feminists, only intensified their opposition to his growing hold on power. Nor was this the only issue that caused the socialist women distress. Perón's willingness to allow the Catholic Church and the military a larger role in education intensified their antipathy towards his rule.[620] As a result, socialist feminists campaigned vigorously against his presidential campaign in 1946.[621]

Socialist feminists were not alone in resisting Perón's effort to co-opt the feminist movement. Conservative feminists, most notably Victoria Ocampo, also criticized the proposal to enact women's suffrage by decree. "Women do not ask for favors, but for justice in reference to civil and political rights," Ocampo declared, "But we ask for them from the appropriate place in the appropriate way, and not from 'de facto' officials who lack authority in this respect." Were women to accept voting rights under such circumstances, she argued, their collaboration in politics would be "worthless"; that they had not done so demonstrated women's

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[618] "Revolucion sin doctrina, gobiernos sin programa," *La Vanguardia,* 4 September, 1943.

[619] Justa G. de Zalazar Pringles, "La mujer argentina frente al sufragio," *Anuario Socialista,* 1946, 169-170.

[620] "La mujer socialista," *La Vanguardia* (suppl.), 21 January 1947; "Exhortación a las madres," *La Vanguardia,* 24 December 1946.

[621] *Por la Unión Democrática; Elector, si quiere Ud. que su voto sea efectivo recuerde-; ¡Las mujeres quieren!; Felix culpa; Coronel Perón; En apoyo de la Unión Democrática; Proclama de la Agrupación Democrática de Avellaneda a las mujeres del partido; Varones Argentinas; Una mujer: un puntal; Varones Argentinos*: Pamphlets in CEDINCI box CA-1.

political maturity.[622] The major newspapers added weight to this argument. Both *La Prensa* and *La Nación* published editorials affirming that women's suffrage was beyond the "natural scope of an emergency government" and that it should await a legally elected congress.[623] Opposition to Perón thus served as a basis for unity among feminists, and a bridge between feminists and those opposed to his rise.

In early September of 1945, the anti-Perón suffragists held a conference of their own in order to counter-balance the earlier gathering. The delegates declared the "absolute repudiation" of the "dictatorial government that has subjected the country to unprecedented institutional disorganization…"[624] These strongly worded protests prompted fears of a confrontation, and *La Prensa* called on women to shun violence and use their moral influence to persuade men to return to constitutional normality. As the month wore on, however, tensions increased. On September 19, thousands of men and women took to the streets to demand an end to the GOU government. Then on October 9, the police arrested a large group of students, mostly female, from the University of Buenos Aires for their participation in similar protests.[625] Clearly, the idea of support for Perón from the majority of suffragists was out of the question. However, the whirlwind of activity surrounding his rise did delay any definite action on the issue

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[622] "La asamblea nacional de mujeres pide el retorno a la normalidad constitutcional," *La Prensa*, 4 September 1945; Victoria Ocampo, "La mujer y el voto," *La Vanguardia,* 11 September 1945,.

[623] "El sufragio femenino," *La Prensa,* 11 July 1945; "Objeta la iniciativa al Ateneo Femenino de Buenos Aires," *La Nación,* 27 July, 1945. The editorial in *La Nación* also repeated the old argument that women needed "previous civic preparation that will prepare her for it."

[624] "La asamblea nacional de mujeres pide el retorno a la normalidad constitucional," *La Prensa,* 4 September 1945.

[625] "Exhortase a la mujer argentina: evitar la guerra civil," *La Prensa*, 4 September 1945; "Nunca hubo en Buenos Aires un acto cívico más numeroso y expresivo que la marcha de la constitución y de la gente," *La Prensa,* 20 September 1945; "Liberan a mujeres contraventores y encarcelan a niñas honestas," *La Vanguardia,* 9 October 1945.

of women voters and contributed to the confrontation that led to his temporary resignation and arrest. These events, in turn, set the stage for a crucial turning point in Perón's political career.[626]

Perón's meteoric rise naturally attracted strong opposition from diverse factions. His support for the Axis powers, by now clearly the losing side in World War II, and his heavy-handed repression of political opponents led to growing confrontations. President Farrell, under severe pressure from army officers opposed to Perón, forced his Vice-President to resign from all of his government posts in early October. Shortly thereafter, the government placed him under arrest. This set the stage for the dramatic events of October 17, which would later be celebrated as "Loyalty Day" under Perón's regime.[627]

The events of October 17, 1945 formed an essential part of the manner in which Perón and Evita would present themselves to the nation and to the world. The events leading up to the day itself are shrouded in Peronist and anti-Peronist legend. Opposition to Perón was the one thing that had united his enemies in and out of the military. Once he was arrested, they apparently made the mistaken assumption that his support would dissolve and they fell to their own disputes. Peronist legend has it that Evita personally led the effort to rally the workers on behalf of her imprisoned lover. As one Peronist publication later described it, "Eva Perón was born that 17th of October 1945 in the breast of that sea which from the...belt of the working districts of Buenos Aires [sic], representing all of the country's workers, ran like an avalanche to the Plaza de Mayo to demand the release of Perón".[628] Other accounts give equal or greater credit to Cipriano Reyes, a meat-packer and leader of the *Confederación General*

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[626] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 126; Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón.,* 10-13.

[627] Rock, *Argentina,* 260.

[628] Subsecretaria de Informaciones de la Presidencia de la Nación (henceforth referred to as "Subsecretaria") *Presencia de Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires, 1953), 9.

del Trabajo (CGT or General Labor Confederation) and to Colonel Domingo Mercante, Perón's most vocal advocate in the military. Nevertheless, during Perón's regime, the story of Evita's role in these events confirmed her importance in the eyes of both Peronists and anti-Peronists. The former used the story as proof of her extraordinary qualities; the latter as proof of her manipulative nature.

Although the exact process is unknown, the impact of the mobilization of the workers was dramatically clear to all concerned. The CGT issued a call for a general strike to be held October 18th in support of Perón. However, the workers spontaneously marched on the Plaza de Mayo and demanded Perón's release on the day before the strike. Divided and faced with an unprecedented popular protest, the government soon gave in and released Perón.[629] The Colonel immediately went to the Plaza de Mayo but waited a few hours before speaking to the crowd in order to build up the tension. Then he and President Farrell appeared and the president, after publicly embracing Perón, introduced him as "the man who has conquered the hearts of all Argentines". Perón made an impassioned address to the assembled throng. He formally resigned his army commission in order "to mingle with the suffering and powerful masses which build up with their work the greatness of the nation". He also used, for the first time, the term *descamisados* (shirtless ones) to refer to his labor supporters. Upper-class Argentines had used the word as a derogatory remark, but Perón now transformed it into a term of honor and a rallying cry that would be used throughout his rule.[630]

Perón lost no time in seizing this opportunity during the subsequent presidential campaign. In Februrary of 1946 Perón won the election by a

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[629] Daniel James, "October 17th and 18th, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism and the Argentine Working Class" *Journal of Social History* 21:2 Summer 1988 441-461.

[630] John Barnes, *Evita, First Lady: A Biographhy of Eva Perón* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 49.

comfortable margin: 56 percent.[631] What was not known at the time was that the day after the mass rally, Eva Duarte became Señora María Eva Duarte de Perón in a small civil wedding. In the interim between October 17 and the election her career as an actress reached its peak, as she took on roles in a number of films, some of which were never released due to her sudden promotion to First Lady in June of 1946. Frequent campaign activities and her official church wedding to Perón in Buenos Aires' Cathedral in December, naturally, interrupted her acting. It was becoming abundantly to all observers clear that she was to play an important role in the coming administration.[632]

Women made up a significant portion of those who publicly rallied around Perón throughout his rise from Secretary of Labor to president. One female Peronist recalled, "what is remarkable is the quantity of women who marched. I don't know if you have noticed in the old news broadcasts, but there are many women." Often these Peronist activists faced outright hostility from the opposition, who seemed to be saying "women were going to take over, that it was prostitution."[633] Nevertheless, Perón's support from the working class remained strong after the October 17 rally, and women organized themselves into a number of small groups in order to support his presidential campaign. In February of 1946, shortly before the election, one of these women's groups held a massive rally for Perón designed to demonstrate the political power of women. At this rally, Evita made her first solo appearance. Although she always accompanied her husband throughout the campaign, she alone addressed the crowd in his absence. However, this first appearance did not go very well

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[631] Rock, *Argentina,* 261.

[632] Barnes, *Evita, First Lady,* 54; Marysa Navarro "Evita and Peronism" in *Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina* Frederick J. Turner and Enrique Miguens, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 21.

[633] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 128-9.

because the crowd wanted to hear Juan Perón himself. Evita had not yet come into her own on the Argentine political stage.[634]

Following his inauguration in June of 1946, Perón moved to consolidate his hold on the government and propagate his plan for the nation. In an address to Congress, he outlined his five-year plan, a program of economic and political reforms designed to bring about his vision of a unified and strong Argentina. Perón once more made it plain how he felt on the issue of women's suffrage. "The incorporation of women in our civic and political activities with all the rights that now are only given to men," he said, "will be an indisputable contribution to the perfection of our civic customs."[635] The senate passed their version of the law later that same year. Nevertheless, it took more than a year for final passage of the law. In the House of Deputies, division within the Peronist majority as well as the persistent opposition of the minority Radical party determined to deny Perón this political advantage and delayed the law for months. Not until after Evita's return from her European journey did the law finally pass Congress, following months of agitation by Peronist women's groups as well as Evita's own lobbying.[636]

Evita and the Suffrage Law

Even though Perón's advocacy of suffrage pre-dated Evita's emergence as a political force, she became the leader of Peronist feminism. Evita was the

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[634] *Ibid.,* 132; dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 30-3.

[635] dos Santos. *Las mujeres peronistas,* 11; *La mujer ya puede votar,* 3. In this speech Perón reiterated all the reasons for granting suffrage, such as the multiple contributions of women in other fields as well as the positive experience of other countries.

[636] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 126.

logical choice to head this campaign. Despite her rocky performance during the presidential campaign, Evita had established herself as the chief spokesperson for Peronism by the end of 1946. Furthermore, through her social work and the creation of the Eva Perón foundation, Evita increased her credibility as an advocate of social justice, and she threw that moral authority behind the campaign for female suffrage. Her whirlwind tour of Europe in 1947 and increased presence as a media magnate enhanced her presence as a public figure. From the fall of 1946 until the final passage of women's voting rights in September of 1947, Evita made regular and impassioned calls for suffrage. In this way, this newcomer to the feminist movement helped secure the long-sought-after goal of women's political participation.

Evita was born Maria Eva Ibarguren in the village of Los Toldos, Buenos Aires province, on May 7, 1919. She was the illegitimate daughter of Juan Duarte and Juana Ibarguren in a small town where secrets were hard to keep. Her upper-crust critics tended to see it as inevitable that such disreputable origins would lead her into a life ruled by greed, passion, lust, and hatred. In their view, Eva was the daughter of an immoral woman and tried to overcompensate for what her childhood had lacked. Her working-class supporters, on the other hand, ignored the details of her upbringing and instead emphasized that she was one of them that had made good: a true Cinderella. Evita herself encouraged this glowing attitude. Her autobiography glossed over the details of her life before meeting Juan Perón, except to demonstrate that from an early age she detested injustice. "I could not get used to this venom and never, since I was eleven years old, did social injustice appear logical to me," she wrote.[637]

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[637] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Relevo, 1973), 16. There is some debate over whether or not Evita actually wrote her own autobiography. One anti-Peronist told of the findings of Chilean reporter Alejandro Magnet who attributed the book to Spanish writer Penella de Silva and claimed that the original was hidden in a vault in Buenos Aires (Ricardo Boizard, *Esa noche de Perón* [Santiago: Imprenta Chile, 1955], 21).

Evita took the first available opportunity to leave her family in order to become an actress in Buenos Aires. She was only fifteen at the time.[638] It was not uncommon for young rural women to migrate. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, single women had come to the city hoping to find work. Unfortunately for them, the available options were few. The best factory jobs were reserved for men, and the meager wages paid female employees were barely enough on which to live. More traditional women's work such as maid, wet-nurse, seamstress, or laundress were hard to find and poorly paid. The one remaining option was the entertainment industry, although this option was connected, either in fact or in the popular imagination, to the prostitution business.[639]

Evita rose slowly but steadily in the hierarchy of the Buenos Aires entertainment scene. Through a combination of a willingness to learn, shear will-power and the supposed assistance of various lovers, she obtained a series of small parts in minor plays. Her career improved considerably in 1942, when she became the lead actress in a radio soap opera. She achieved her greatest success in this role, and her experience as an actress would stand her in good stead in her later years. Her success on the radio earned her an invitation to a charity event sponsored by the radio company in 1944, where she met the most important person in her life: Colonel Juan Domingo Perón.[640] The exact details surrounding that first encounter are unfortunately, lost to history.

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[638] Barnes, *Evita, First Lady,* 16.

[639] For a thorough description and analysis of the Buenos Aires sex industry and its implications, see Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). Evita's association with this industry, like her childhood, is an object of derision for her critics and is largely ignored by her supporters.

[640] Barnes, *Evita, First Lady,* Ch.2.

Evita could hardly have been ignorant of the benefits of being closely connected to Perón. By this point, Perón had well established his position within the government not only as Secretary of Labor, but as Minister of War and Vice-President as well.[641] Evita naturally sought to form a relationship with this considerably older officer. Although they did not publicly acknowledge their relationship, her career experienced a dramatic improvement shortly after their first encounter in January of 1944. She was given a raise and greater privileges at the radio station. At the same time she also became involved in her lover's political career, playing hostess to informal gatherings of officials at her apartment and, after October 17, 1945, assisting his bid for the presidency.[642]

Once in power, however, he faced a new challenge. As Evita put it, although he now had the power to pursue his goals "it was precisely this abundance of power that prevented the Leader from maintaining his contact with the people". Evita thus "chose the humble task of attending to the small requests" so that "the people, and above all the workers, would always find the way to their Leader open".[643] This is a tremendous oversimplification of the process by which Evita became the second most powerful person in the nation.

Although Evita never served in any elected position, as First Lady her skills as a politician blossomed, reinforcing her husband's political power. Through her contacts in the radio industry, Evita had already proven herself to be useful in promoting Perón's public image. For example, in 1944 she lent her voice to a series of broadcasts outlining Perón's vision for the future.[644] Now she

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[641] See Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 86.

[642] Barnes *Evita, First Lady,* 33. See Daniel James, *Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-76* (Cambridge, 1988) for more on the connections between Perón and labor.

[643] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 58, 65.

[644] Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón: aBiography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 85.

added to that strength. Soon after the inauguration she occupied an office at the Ministry of Labor, her husband's old office. She held no official capacity there, but she soon proved herself as someone who could facilitate the approval of requests. In this way, she began to form a power base in much the same way that her husband had. Not only unions but also government officials came to realize that winning her favor was the one of the most effective ways to obtain their requests. They also learned, just as quickly, that attracting her displeasure, or even becoming too powerful or independent of her or her husband's control, could lead to grave consequences.[645]

The Eva Perón Foundation was one of the most critical and direct institutions by which she exercised control.[646] One of the many legendary confrontations between Evita and the society ladies of Argentina led to the creation of her own charity. Traditionally in Argentina the Beneficent Society invited the first lady to serve as its chair. This charitable organization, according to its upperclass supporters, "by its impersonal organization...and the Christian values of the distinguished ladies of Argentine society did good for the sake of goodness..."[647] However, they did not extend the usual invitation to Evita. When she inquired why, the society ladies replied that she was too young. Both sides knew that the reason she wasn't accepted was that the "distinguished" grand dames of Argentine society wanted nothing to do with this woman of such humble origins and checkered past.

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[645] Abundant evidence of this is provided by her enemies, and the fact that such an avid supporter of Perón such as Cipriano Reyes was expelled from the CGT and replaced by her own hand-picked leader lends credence to these accusations. See Taylor and Mary Main *The Woman with the Whip: Eva Perón* (New York: Doubleday, 1952).

[646] We will explore the other, the Peronist Women's Party, in the following chapter.

[647] Eduardo Agusto García *Yo fuí testigo* (Buenos Aires: Luise Laiserre y Cía S.A., 1971), 413.

Evita decided to put the Beneficent Society out of business, establishing her own charitable organization, with the financial assistance of the peronist government and private “donors”. It was through the Eva Perón Foundation that Evita sought to fulfill the "small requests" of workers across the country. Every day, she devoted a large part of her busy schedule (she got up at six every morning and often stayed up past midnight) to meet with humble persons seeking a job, a house, clothing and food, or medical assistance. Her supporters cited this personal contact as evidence of her abundant compassion. Her enemies chalked it up either to "Machiavellian design" or to "the hunger in her for recognition and applause [that] could never be appeased," as one especially harsh critic wrote.[648] Whatever her motivation, the Foundation soon became one of the most powerful organizations in the country, representing a significant part of the Nation's wealth. Voluntary contributions from the government, unions, and individual workers and less enthusiastic donations from businesses and other wealthy interests swelled the Foundation’s coffers.[649] There have also been rumors that she sequestered as much as 700 million dollars in Swiss bank accounts.[650] It is clear, in any case, that Evita herself benefited politically at least as much from the Foundation as did the rest of the nation materially.

Apart from any possibility of monetary benefit, the Foundation provided an opportunity for Evita to enhance her own political skills and reputation while

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[648] James, *Doña María’s Story*, 79-3; Main, *The Woman with the Whip,* 177.

[649] Again, there is abundant evidence for this that is regularly cited by Perón's critics. Congress provided a portion of the Foundation’s funding- Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de sesiones de 1948*, v. 4, 2760-1. However, most of the funds came from private contributions which may or may not have come willingly- see Nestor Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1990), 40-5. Ferioli also suggests that the government had already intended to take over the Sociedad de Beneficencia, and that the Foundation served as a convenient replacement.

[650] García, *Yo fuí testigo,* 431. Much of this fortune allegedly came from those doing business with the government.

maintaining the popular support that kept her husband's political machine running. The shear size of the Foundation's activities required considerable management skill as it reached into all the different activities of the Sociedad de Beneficencia. These programs provided service common to all feminist groups, though with some unique twists. Education, for example, became a central concern of the Foundation. One of the Foundation's programs created supplemental learning facilities for all students. These facilities, designed to compensate for schools that "did not educate, did not develop, did not morally edify" students but only "limited themselves to instruction" made it possible for a child to go from pre-school to the University under the guidance of Peronist instructors.[651] One of the most dramatic examples of the extraordinary effort devoted to instruction was the Children's City, which occupied two city blocks. This miniature city- all of the buildings were constructed in proportion to the boys and girls enrolled there- served as a giant day-care center designed to teach children about adult responsibilities. The décor included the portraits of Juan and Evita that became standard for all the buildings of the foundation.[652] Other Foundation educational facilities for children included the "Home-schools", which acted as boarding schools for the nation's youth, and the "Student City" that provided housing for provincial students attending schools in Buenos Aires and other cities.[653] While centered in Buenos Aires, these institutions drew students from across the nation, therefore disseminating Peronist indoctrination and education throughout the country.

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[651] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos, 1946-48* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Megafón, 1985), 47.

[652] Fundación Eva Perón, *Ciudad infantil y hogares escuelas* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1949?), 8-10. An opponent of Perón's who visited the city asserted that the facility went unused, and that the city was little more than an oversized dollhouse for Evita. Main *The Woman with the Whip,*181-4.

[653] *Ciudad Estudiantil*, 12; *Ciudad infantil y hogares escuelas,* 37-42; Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón,* 66-83.

The Foundation's efforts to spread Peronist doctrine extended to health care as well as education. The Foundation's nursing school served as a prominent showpiece of the administration, as trainee's often traveled to other nations accompanying the aid packages Perón sent to South American nations in times of crisis.[654] The students of the nursing school often participated in Peronist rallies and parades as well and even had a school song that demonstrated their devotion to Perón:

> The Peronist women advance/ singing the song of serenity/ We advance showing the conquest/ of hope with Evita and with Perón./ In the new Argentina illuminated/ by the rays of a Redeeming sun/ Justice and Well-being/ is given by the Foundation/ that bears the name of Eva and of Perón.[655]

The Policlínico Evita, however, served as the Foundation's primary health care facility. This modern hospital included all the latest technology, but as with the educational facilities, Perón's opponents cast doubt on whether or not it actually served its stated purpose of providing health care for the poor.[656] However well the hospital functioned, as a means of projecting a positive image of Evita, and therefore of her husband's regime, this and other projects of the Foundation succeeded admirably.[657] In short, they sought to convince observers that "there is a perfect order that resolves everything under a government that is

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[654] Eva Perón Foundation, *Nursing School* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, n.d.), 11-2.

[655] Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón,* 116.

[656] Main, *The Woman with the Whip.,* 189.

[657] Fundación Eva Perón, *Policlínico Evita* (Buenos Aires: Secretaria de Prensa y Difusión, 1953),. For other examples of Foundation projects see Fundación Eva Perón, *Un sueño hecho realidad: el hogar de ancianos Coronel Perón* (Buenos Aires: Secretaria de Prensa y Difusión , 1949?); Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón,* 101-8, 141-2; Eva Perón, *Mi obra de ayuda social* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950).

also perfect."[658] While the use of charitable organizations as a means of political propaganda may seem cynical, it should be remembered that other parties, including many of the feminists, also used education and other forms of social activism as a means to promote their ideologies. Once again, Evita had simply continued a precedent set by her feminist predecessors.

Evita's genius for promoting herself and her husband, as well as the limits to those abilities, became most evident during her tour of Europe from June to August of 1947, also known as the Rainbow Tour. What began as a goodwill trip to Spain soon expanded to include Portugal, Italy, the Vatican, France and Switzerland- nation's eager to promote good relations with Argentina, a major food supplier to European countries ravaged by World War II.[659] Perón was equally anxious to improve his reputation abroad, which had been marred by accusations of close ties to the former axis powers. Unfortunately for him, Evita's first stop in General Francisco Franco's Spain did nothing to diminish this perception. Indeed, Evita almost certainly confirmed foreign opinion that Perón sympathized with fascism as she demonstrated extravagant largesse to the Spanish and apparently warm regard towards Franco. However, the Spanish demonstrated tremendous hospitality towards her, raising hopes for the tour as a whole. Her reception in most of the other nations on the tour was considerably less friendly. The French and the Vatican treated her respectfully but coolly. In

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[658] Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón,* 141-2.

[659] U.S. State Department, *Ibid.,* reel 18-835.0011/4-947. The list of countries also included Britain, at first, but the Labor government did not wish to appear over-friendly to what it perceived to be a fascist regime. The invitation they sent was therefore lukewarm at best, and in the event the Argentines politely declined it- *Ibid.,* reel 18-835.0011/5-547 and 18-835.0011/6-1247. For further details on the trip, see Dujovne Ortiz, 163-203 and Fraser and Navarro, 88-101. Fraser and Navarro note that following the visit Evita adopted a distinct style in her dress, which became more conservative, and her activities, which became more focused on organization and less on public spectacles.

Italy and Switzerland protestors greeted her with raucous demonstrations, even going so far as to throw tomatoes at her motorcade.

At home, the impact of the European tour had on public opinion appeared minimal. For those who already disliked Evita, the trip, with its extravagant costs and extensive publicity, merely reinforced their attitude towards her. Evita also generated nationalist pride both through her success in Spain and her cooler reception elsewhere.[660] In other words, to her supporters she could do no wrong. Certainly the reception waiting for her upon her return to Buenos Aires left nothing to be desired, as Perón himself and a large crowd turned out to greet her and to hear her words once again.[661] Evita made it clear that her journey demonstrated how much better off Argentina was under Perón. The devastation of World War II was the result of "egoism without limits," she said, and all Peronists "should look at that vast desolation in order to better comprehend and value more effectively the work of social peace that the third position of General Perón realizes and sustains."[662] The mixed success of the European trip in terms of its original goals of promoting Perón's reputation abroad gave Evita more material for conveying to the nation the benefits of following Perón. The trip also confirmed Evita's importance as a political actor, making her that much more effective as an advocate of suffrage.

The Final Drive for Suffrage

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[660] *Ibid.,* reel 18-835.0011/8-2647. *La Vanguardia* took the government to task for funding Evita's extravagant gestures, remarking that no "oligarch" had ever spent so much on a single trip- "Los gastos del viaje de la señora de Perón," *La Vanguardia,* 26 August 1947.

[661] *Ibid.,* reel 18-835.0011/9-447.

[662] Eva Perón, *Discurso de Eva Perón en el acto inaugural de la asamblea nacional del movimiento peronista femenino* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Información,1950), 29-30.

Evita's demands for women's suffrage made use of many of the same themes and rhetorical images that she utilized in the Rainbow Tour and earlier campaigns. These declarations and exhortations outlined the ambiguous role women would play in the Argentina of Perón. Foremost among these themes was the idea of social justice. Like other suffragists, Evita argued for suffrage based on long standing traditions of female sacrifice to the nation as well as on their contributions to other aspects of society.[663] Evita reminded the nation of the part women played in the triumph of Perón and by extension in the accomplishment of all the benefits of the new regime. She argued that women "who had come so far along with the men to form one will; the 'descamisada' that made each home a bulwark of revolutionary exaltation; the heart that sustained, without faltering or retreating, the triumph of the people on [the election day of] February 24th" could not be neglected by the new Peronist state.[664]

Evita stated that women need not sit passively by as the government made its decisions. In one radio address, Evita reminded the women of the nation of their role on that memorable October 17. "[You] have the duty to concern yourselves with the moral and political structure of the nation," Evita told the women of Argentina, "You have the right to demand it." Suffrage should be "no less than the ritual renewal of your spontaneous sacrifice of the 17th of October."[665] The Peronist government itself accepted these arguments. In his address to the House of Deputies shortly before the measure finally passed,

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[663] For example, in an address to the women of the Americas, Evita claimed that alongside every man who shaped the history of the New World, "there was a woman who eased his passage, a woman who helped the homeland, a woman that collaborated in the first hours of America." Eva Perón,. *Mensaje a las mujeres de América,* 6.

[664] Eva Perón, *Discursos Completos,* 33-4. This speech was broadcast on national radio 27 January, 1947. February 24th refers to the Election Day of the previous year.

[665] *Ibid.,* 64. Speech made 12 March, 1947.

Minister of the Interior Angel Borlenghi declared that suffrage "is not a gift made by the political parties" but rather was "a conquest by the women of Argentina themselves" that followed numerous accomplishments they had produced in other fields.[666]

In her calls for women's suffrage, Evita also made the point of highlighting not only the role she thought women ought to play but also the goals that she thought they should seek. These goals, which received special emphasis when she addressed international audiences, underscored efforts to achieve peace and justice. In a speech broadcast during her visit to Spain she declared that women, once having won the right to vote, were then obliged to "advance the triumph of a social and familial order in which they may share along with men the fruits of peace and justice." [667] Peace and justice, however, were couched in familiar Peronist terms. Workers in particular were meant to benefit from peace and justice. Evita once urged women at an inter-American conference to fight for "social justice for the workers of the continent; for the achievement of their dreams and desires crystallized in their indisputable rights to work, to enjoy fair compensation, to reach their best positions and have decent working conditions." She defined peace as that which "reaffirms faith in the basic human rights of human beings" and that which would lead to " a better future, based on love and not hate…and which above all, would restore to mankind the inalienable rights of liberty and sovereignty."[668] Implicit in this statement is a critique of foreign influence in national politics, a particular target of the nationalist Peronists. Responding to critics who accused her of cementing an "axis" with the fascist Spanish regime, Evita remarked that "I have not come to form axes, but to bring

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[666] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesiones de 1947*, v. 4, 243.

[667] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos,* 99. Speech made 15 June, 1947.

[668] Eva Perón, *Mensaje a las mujeres de America*, 8-9.

forward rainbows of peace to all peoples, as is fitting for the spirit of a woman."[669] Evita thus enunciated a particular vision of international relations that was both nationalist and cooperative.

In two critical ways, Evita's vision of women's roles differed significantly from feminism both in the modern and earlier sense. Her calls for the women of Argentina to submit their desires and goals to the leadership of the State, over and above her exaltation of Perón as the guardian of women's rights, clearly set her apart form other feminists. Furthermore, while she agreed with earlier feminists on the fundamental points of feminism, she often used the same arguments as the anti-feminists had used to discredit them. That is, she labeled earlier feminists as unnatural and their political efforts as a sign that they wished to be men themselves. This last argument betrays a certain irony, given her own high-profile role in the political life of the nation. While division among feminists was nothing new, such overt hostility towards women who had argued the same points was a novelty.

Evita took care to connect her introduction to the cause of women's rights to her inspiration for all political matters- that is, she attributed it to the influence of her husband. By her own definition, she differed from other women who recognized the need for greater rights in that when faced with the choice to pursue the matter, "they stayed put and I moved forward." She immediately declared, however, that "if the struggle excites me it was not because of me but because of him: Because of Perón!" She dismisses the irony of placing a man at the forefront of a women's rights movement with the simple assertion that "to recognize the superiority of Perón is another matter."[670] Exaltation of Perón both set up and evaded a critique of her own activity. This suggests that she expected

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[669] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos,* 99.

[670] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 191-2.

her reader to simply agree with her and ignore her idolization of a man, which a dedicated Peronist certainly might have been inclined to do. Alternatively, this rhetorical tactic diverted the argument away from her own, ambiguous views and onto the merits of Perón and Peronism, and thus, for her at least, on to more solid ground.

While putting Perón forward as the ultimate symbol of the goals of her feminist movement, Evita also made sure to minimize the contributions of earlier women activists. At the same time she put herself forward as the true leader of the women's movement. Evita accomplished this first by denying the earlier feminist leaders of the very quality of womanhood. To her, they seemed motivated by the anger of "not having been born as men, rather than by the pride of being women. They even think that it is disgraceful to be a woman."[671] While the charge seems exaggerated, it certainly represents the degree to which Evita wished to de-legitimize any possible rivals in the women's movement. The elimination of rivals, furthermore, fits in well with traditional Peronist calls for unity. In an address to the women of the nation, Evita clearly expresses her belief in unity, despite the resistance of other feminist groups. "I think that we [women] now speak a common language of faith, and we embrace the same hope of good things to come," Evita said, "I think we are more together every day, more intimately linked to our common destiny."[672] By declaring this unity as already in existence, Evita suggested that any divergent opinion was contrary to the common good.

Evita never left any doubt that this unity was to be under her guidance. Addressing the women of the nation through her newspaper, *Democracia*, Evita described a meeting in which she urged rapid passage of the suffrage law "in the

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[671] *Ibid.,* 193.

[672] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos*, 31.

name of all of you, who spontaneously made me your representative and ratified that choice so many times." She followed this reminder of leadership with another call for unity. "If we want to triumph," she wrote, "we must unite our forces, without exception, without gaps in our ranks." Evita called on her female readers to rally outside of the Congress on the day the suffrage debates began.[673] Deputy Eduardo Colom referred to this gathering, which he claimed numbered 50,000 participants, as proof that the suffrage bill required immediate attention.[674] Evita clearly had the ability to mobilize substantial numbers, an ability that no politician could ignore.

Evita's dominance over female political activism did not end with the suffrage movement. Like many of the earlier advocates of women's suffrage, she did not see the vote as an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. Having won the vote "under the banner of Perón, whose elections are a model of purity and honor," women would use suffrage "to claim all of our rights…or better yet the great right of being simply *women*."[675] In making use of the vote, women could help defend the gains of the Peronist "revolution". Moreover, she argued that Perón "needs the inviolable bulwark of the home and of the intuitive and substantively conservative impulses of women, to advance and sustain his program of action for the government."[676] Here is a statement that outlines as plainly as possible the motives for the Peronist state's interest in women's

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[673] *Ibid.* 110-1. Editorial printed 30 August, 1947.

[674] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesiones de 1947*, v. 4, 68. Specifically, Colom cites a passage from Juan Alberdi's influential work *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*: "The law does not recognize differences between classes or persons."

[675] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 195-6. Emphasis in the original.

[676] Eva Perón, Discursos completos, 42. Speech given 12 February, 1947.

suffrage- by obtaining the vote, women would generate additional political capital for Perón.

The vision of the future that included women's suffrage did not end with this simple electoral calculation, however. According to Evita, women "are closer to the heart of the country, because they are closer to the needs of the people."[677] This closeness, combined with women's moral qualities and their importance in the care of the home and the education of children, meant that the vote gave them responsibility for guiding the long-term health of the nation as well. In one speech, Evita referred to the women of Sparta, who "understood the importance that women had for the State: educate children and form men."[678] Once again, women's traditional roles as mothers and teachers are reinforced, but Evita's use of the Spartans carried an additional significance. By referring to one of the most famously militarized nations in history, Evita implied not only that the state valued women as mothers, but also that women themselves were valuable only insofar as they sustained the State. Her remarks concerning the oligarchy and "idle" women demonstrate an overriding concern for a unified as well as a productive nation.[679] Women must therefore be prepared to make "once more their constant tribute to the nation" in exchange for the promise of a glorious future and their rights as citizens.[680]

The ideal of selfless action, coupled with the exaltation of both women's and worker's rights, also permeated Evita's view of female labor. The increasing presence of women in the workplace had already become a significant social

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[677] *Ibid.*, 76. Radio address to the women of Mendoza province, 4 April, 1947.

[678] *Ibid.,* 50. Speech given by radio 19 February, 1947. Evita specifically refers to Plutarch in this example, a reference that perhaps came back to haunt her in the U.S press (see chapter 2).

[679] See Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón.,* 22.

[680] Eva Perón, *Ibid.,* 12. Speech given by radio 25 July, 1946.

trend by the mid-1940's, one that had already generated controversy. The experience of female laborers was certainly difficult judging from their own recollections, and it is not difficult for one to understand why Perón's program of workers' rights for women might have been appealing. Some of these experiences reflected the conditions of all industrial laborers, regardless of sex. For example, one worker related that she had to ask permission to use the restroom, and that one's allotted time there was jealously watched by a manager with a stopwatch.[681] Other difficulties were reserved solely to women, as those who sought to enter the workplace for whatever reason faced a great deal of prejudice. "When I worked," one female worker remembered, "to work in the factory was a bad word…So then we lied. We said we were 'employees" because already employees were something else."[682] Women faced societal disapproval when entering the professions as well, even professions that in other nations might have been acceptable for "respectable" women. Women often worked as teachers. However, "if one said 'now I am going to study to be a nurse or something,"' one informant recalled, "it was like saying 'I am going to the street to become a prostitute.'"[683] Whether or not a woman wished to work, those who sought employment inevitably faced discrimination.

Evita, despite her support of women's rights, shared the prevailing negative attitude towards working women. In her autobiography, Evita noted that "every day thousands of women abandon the feminine field and begin to live and work like men. They prefer, like them, the street to the home." For Evita, this trend not only failed to resolve existing problems, but created new ones. "If we submit to the work that makes us sufficiently independent to form a home," she

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[681] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 125.

[682] *Ibid.,* 123. Employee (*empleada*) in this case indicated a low-rank clerical position. Worker (obrera) on the other hand, indicated blue collar work, which even men founded disagreeable.

[683] *Ibid.*

states, "then we definitively burn our boats right there."[684] Evita recognized the economic necessity that caused many women to enter the workplace but felt that in doing so they lost that which made them women. As we have already seen, Evita considered the chief roles of women to be those of mother and teacher- the moral foundations of the State. Since women could not, in her view, fulfill these roles and work a full day at the same time, one of Evita's top priorities was to find a way to restore women to the home. This goal became part of the rationale for the Eva Perón Foundation, which sought to support women and children and reinforce the values cherished by the Peronist State.[685] Yet at the same time, several of these projects, such as the transient homes for provincial women looking for work in the city and the nursing school, seemed to encourage women's entrance into the workplace.

In supporting women workers through the Foundation, Evita appeared to be contradicting herself- helping working women to get by while at the same time crying out against women who left the home. This seeming contradiction, however, becomes more understandable when one recalls the division between oligarch and *descamisado.* Women of the oligarchy, who included socialists and other left-wing groups as well as the upper class in general, were the ones that Evita specifically targeted when she denounced women who behaved like men. Working class women, on the other hand, were true *descamisadas*. In the language of Peronism, they were authentic Argentines of impeccable moral quality. If such women went to work, it was only because they had to do so in order to support their families. With the proper support network in place, Evita

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[684] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 197-8.

[685] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 34-6.

was certain that these women would happily return to the domestic sphere where they belonged.[686]

In her descriptions of women-who-were-not-women, Evita distinguished between two types. On one hand, there were those absorbed by the "social life". To these women, "the home is…secondary; a sacrifice to all that is the 'social life' with its parties and meetings, bridge games, horse races, etc." Women of the "social life" are thus members of the oligarchy in the truest sense- wealthy and self-absorbed.[687] The other type included the old feminists and other politically active women. Evita, using her husband once more as the last word on a given subject, related an observation that he made about this group of women. "They want to be men," she said, "It is as if in order to save the workers I had wanted them to be oligarchs."[688] This last juxtaposition of workers and oligarchy with women and feminists (the latter an especially odd division) underscores the degree to which Evita sought to unite the political rights of women with the overall cause of Peronism. At the same time, the statement also shows the degree to which Evita wanted to exclude any alternatives to the Peronist version of feminism, lumping them together under the same heading of "oligarchy," a code for anything opposed to Perón.

The second part to this strategy of dichotomy was the creation of an outline of the role this woman was to play in the new Argentina of Perón. To begin, the Peronists made it clear how and why women had suffered. Simply to point to economic factors as the reason so many women had left the home did not satisfy this goal. For Evita, it was even more important to give the source of

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[686] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón.,* 32-3. Socialist feminists, naturally, rejected this term, arguing that Perón's "officialism" and strong-man style of rule made him the real oligarch. "Y ahora: ¿cual es la oligarquía?," *La Vangurardia,* 24 November 1946.

[687] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 218.

[688] *Ibid.*, 124.

their problems a face, in order to guide the Peronist rank and file towards a solution. In the case of women, this vision of the poor conditions that existed before the rise of Peronism at times strayed from the usual rhetoric. "At the doors of the home" Evita once declared, "one nation ends and another begins with other laws and other rights…the laws and rights of the man…who many times is a lord and sometimes is also…a dictator." Her solution to this situation, however, was freedom from want, so that women would be able "to have in the home what we search for in the streets."[689] Evita thus narrowly skirts such thorny issues as domestic violence or direct State intervention in the home, instead returning to more traditional Peronist themes.

Evita used familiar Peronist bogeymen to define the source of suffering for women workers- the oligarchy, and capitalism as it was practiced in the "old" days in particular provided her clear and easily exploited targets for the anxieties of workers of all types. In her speeches, Evita used images of long-suffering women, sacrificing everything for their families, as a means to reinforce this sense of anger. Working class women during the "liberal" (pre-Perón) era, according to Evita, suffered twice as much as other workers because at home they "monopolized all of the misery, all of the desolation, all of the sacrifices, so that their children might avoid them." At work, they faced the second aspect of this suffering as they had to confront all the repression and hard labor experienced by the male workers.[690] This suffering in turn led to what Evita considered to be the greatest crime of the old-style capitalists: "The industrialist having finally discovered the woman as a less expensive factor of production, transformed working women into the competitor of her own brother laborers."[691]

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[689] *Ibid.,* 198-9.

[690] Eva Perón, *Discursos de Eva Perón en el acto inaugural de la asamblea nacional del movimiento peronista femenino* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950), 31-4.

[691] *Ibid.,* 34.

Women were thus simultaneously absolved of the supposed sin of having left the home and given a reason for their suffering.

Evita, having established the source and nature of the problems working women suffered, now laid out a course of action was now required. In addition to reducing the number of women in the workplace through the support of the State and the Foundation, the Peronist government sought to eliminate the tendency of employers to see women merely as a cheaper "factor of production." Perón himself, according to Evita, was a long-time supporter of equal pay for equal work, and Evita encouraged her female supporters to work for equal pay as they had for political rights.[692] In the congressional debates over suffrage, several deputies also recognized this link between the vote and improvements in the workplace. Deputy Angel Baulina reminded his colleagues in Congress that with the vote it was also necessary "to arrive at the other reform that more precisely and directly affects the home: the right of the woman to equal compensation as men when they perform the same functions."[693] While this strong stand in favor of equal pay for women might appear to be a bold and forward-thinking development for Argentine society, it should be remembered that working class women were almost wholly unskilled. Unions that supported this idea sought to make female employees less competitive in the labor market. Most of the professions still included very few women, and Evita did little to encourage women to move into new economic fields.

Calls for equal rights merely released the potential political energy represented by working class women. Once that energy was released, it required direction. Evita, who constantly reminded the female beneficiaries of

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[692] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos,* 252. Speech given at the First Congress of Textile Workers, 20 August, 1948. Recall that women formed the majority of textile workers at that time.

[693] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesiones de 1947*, v. 4, 221. See also the remarks of Oscar López Serrot (232) and Ramón Washington Tejada (85).

Perón's policies that those rights "should be ever present in the minds and consciences of all women who follow General Perón and who are prepared to fight for his revolutionary conquests," the direction for women was to act as enforcers and watchdogs of Peronism in the home and the workplace.[694] Evita called on Peronist women to watch out for any problems of production and to shun any foreign influence in the economy in order to speed the nation toward economic recovery.[695] This economic function of women became particularly important as the post war boom began to subside. High wages and numerous benefits led to inflation, and Perón soon found himself in the position of requiring austerity programs by the early 1950's. This was the great test of his regime, as he struggled to maintain the support his generous programs for workers had won him. Evita did everything she could to sustain her husband's government, calling on every woman to be "a vigilant sentinel of austerity" by reducing consumption and increasing production. Evita further directed the women's party to disseminate information about Perón's economic plan, and to be on the watch to make sure that all members paid the fixed prices set by the government.[696] Women were thus directed by Evita to serve as the teachers and the conscience of the nation in a concrete way.

Evita's outreach to the women of Argentina was by no means a one-woman campaign. In addition to her speeches, broadcast throughout the nation by radio, Evita also used the print media to spread her message. Foremost among these was the newspaper *Democracia*, which Evita owned. This paper, serving as the principal peronista publication during his regime and as Evita's mouthpiece. However, it also provided an opportunity for other peronistas to add

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[694] Eva Perón, *Discurso de Eva Perón en el acto inaugural…*, 27.

[695] *Ibid.,* 26.

[696] *Habla Eva Perón,* (Buenos Aires: Partido Peronista Femenina, 1952), 4-7.

their voices in support of Perón as well.[697] Peronistas did not have to rely solely on the semi-official channels of the press, however. In the early years of Perón's regime, a wide variety of peronista clubs appeared to mobilize women. Many of these groups recognized Evita's importance through their names- the "Women's Social Work Group 'María Eva Duarte de Perón'", the "Women's Group 'María Eva Duarte de Perón'", the "Evita Women's Center", and so forth.[698] In later years, the Peronist Women's Party united these groups into one organization. In the meantime, the peronista clubs served an important role in gathering popular support among women. Peronistas also had access to publications other than those controlled by Evita. Over time, however, these publications became more and more laudatory, serving as a means to praise the "idol of the enthusiastic masses that acclaim him."[699] The unity that Perón valued so highly left little room for dissent.

Unsurprisingly, the tone of the opinions expressed in these publications tended to echo those expressed by Evita herself. These authors all agreed that Perón was the only politician capable of making suffrage a reality. One such article made the ironic statement that "before Perón appeared there had been no awareness in the country of the need for women's suffrage."[700] By this argument, previous regimes had been too corrupt to take the idea of suffrage seriously. The nation had to "displace the oligarchy" to allow for the vote, and the first step was

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[697] For an example of a transcript, see "La conferencia de la señora de Perón," *Democracia*, 13 February 1947; for an example of a peronista-written article, see Hilda N. Castiñeras, "Existe enorme expectativa en el país por la histórica proclamación en plaza mayor," *Democracia,* 18 September 1947.

[698] "El voto femenino deberá tratar diputados en le semana entrante," *Democracia,* 1 September 1947.

[699] Delfina Fide Alvarez in Enrique Ramirez, *Diós-Patria-Perón y Evita* (Córdoba: Edituesta, 1951), 71-2.

[700] "El Gral. Perón hizo posible la gran conquista femenina del sufragio," *Democracia*, 11 September 1947.

the GOU-led overthrow that brought Perón to power, ending "a long period of neglect for Argentine women."[701] These women, in turn, proved that they deserved the vote by taking to the streets on October 17. One article also argued that women who participated in anti-Perón demonstrations also proved their fitness for the vote, an argument that peronists would find unthinkable in later years.[702] Therefore feminism had a place in defending the Peronist revolution. Feminism also fit in with Perón's plans to make the nation "marches to the beat of modern times" by ending the "infuriating injustice" of women's political inequality.[703] In short, these articles sought to demonstrate why suffrage was a good idea and why Perón was guaranteed to enact it.

While the peronista press followed Evita's lead in upholding Perón, they also developed a theme that Evita herself could not- Evita's own importance to the nation and to feminism. In her own speeches, Evita effaced any credit for her own actions, directing all her praise towards Perón. To do otherwise would have been to invite further accusations of self-agrandizement. Her peronista followers had no reason to be restrained. "The light of a new dawn for women has been lit," wrote Peronista Hilda Castiñeras, "thanks to the generosity and understanding of one who has quite justly received the name Lady of Hope from the people."[704] In this line of reasoning Evita deserved just as much credit for

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[701] "Será tributado un homenaje al General Perón y a su esposa," *Democracia*, 21 September 1947, p. 1; "Las mujeres argentinas recalman sus derechos," *Democracia,*11 February 1947, p. 3.

[702] *Ibid.*

[703] "La primera dama invita a concurrir a todas las mujeres para la histórica ceremonia: ha formulado una convocatoria," *Democracia,* 12 September 1947. See also "En los momentos difíciles del país, la mujer siempre estuvo presente," *Democracia*, 22 April 1947 and "El verdadero ritmo de la vida se conseguirá cuando intervenga en política," *Democracia,* 25 February 1947.

[704] Hilda N. Castiñeras, "Existe enorme expectativa en el país por la histórica proclamación en plaza mayor," *Democracia*, 18 September 1947.

making suffrage possible as Perón himself. She, as well as Perón, had achieved "complete political independence, diverging from the canons of the old guard that never fulfilled their promises to the citizens of Argentina."[705] The peronistas expressed confidence that Evita would not rest until "the conquest that will dignify women" became a reality and that she would lead them to "fight, suffer and work for security, honor for the home and greatness for the homeland." If women worked for Perón under Evita's leadership, they argued, suffrage would become a reality at last.[706]

The opportunity for such intensive mobilization might not have appeared, however, had it not been for the delays in bringing the Peronist suffrage project to a vote. The suffrage proposal made good progress through the Senate. But the House of Deputies, which until then had always been the most active body in the suffrage campaign, placed obstacles in its path. Over a year passed before the final version of the law finally cleared congress and the peronists could claim victory. Once again, one can find the explanation for this delay among those who feared the consequences of women's suffrage. In this case, however, the opponents were among those who had worked hardest for female voting rights before 1945- and who continued to do so under the new regime. The debate was not a matter of whether or not women should vote, for nearly everyone agreed that they should, but who would be able to earn the political capital from

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[705] "Es obra de Evita dice Nelly Omar," *Democracia*, 23 September 1947; For similar expressions see "La ley de sufragio femenino será un complemento a los derechos civiles," *Democracia,* 14 March 1947 and Carolina P. de Eboli, "Debemos gratitud a la obra de la esposa del presidente," *Democracia*, 20 September 1947.

[706] "Mujer: tu voto será el escudo de tu fe y el testimonio de esperanza en su futuro mejor," *Democarcia,* 18 February 1947; "…y el voto femenino será la primera apelación y la última," *Democracia,* 28 January 1947; "El sufragio para la mujer significa el imperio de la soberanía popular," *Democarcia* 5 march 1947. In later years, the peronista magazine *El mundo peronista* published frequent reminders of the story of women's suffrage and Evita's role in bringing it to pass. See "Historia de luchas y esperanzas," *El Mundo Peronista,* 2:31, 15 October 1952, p. 25 and "Una pagina en le lucha de Eva Perón por la dignificación de la mujer," *El Mundo Peronista,* 4:81, 15 February 1955, p. 48.

successfully bringing the long-awaited reform to light. Ultimately, the peronistas won this battle of public relations, making themselves out to be the true feminists and their rivals among the suffragists appear as the villains of the story.

Perón, even before his inauguration in 1946, did not hesitate to make suffrage a part of his formal agenda. In an address to congress, he declared that the "growing intervention of women in social, economic and cultural activities of every sort has qualified her for a distinct place in the civic and political life of the nation." Therefore he asked for a suffrage law. Later that same year, he made women's suffrage a part of his five-year plan for the nation, reaffirming his support for the issue.[707] The Senate responded almost instantly, initiating the review of a suffrage law that came to the floor on July 19. The project authored by Lorenzo Soler of Mendoza made women "equal to men in terms of all rights and duties, that is, political, economic, social and human accorded by the Constitution and laws of Argentina." The project did exempt women from military service, but otherwise provided for equal voting rights, requiring the executive branch to complete enrollment of new voters within a year of passage.[708] During the first reading of the bill, Soler repeated many of the by now familiar arguments in favor of suffrage. According to his remarks, lack of voting rights was an "anachronism" that needed to be remedied, and that the vote would not bring about "the sundering of the harmony that lives in the intimacy of the home" but rather rescue women from an unequal position and promote "mutual understanding."[709] None of the other senators objected to these arguments. Nevertheless, another month passed before the project came up again for final

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[707] Juan Perón, *El pueblo ya sabe de qué se trata* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1946), 217- speech delivered June 26, 1947; Vera Pichel, *Delia D. de Parodi: una mujer en el congreso* (Buenos Aires: Circulo de legisladores de la nación argentina, 1994), 15-6.

[708] Congreso Nacional, Cámara del Senado, *Diario de sesiones de 1946*, v. 1, p. 85; *Ibid.,* 303-4.

[709] *Ibid.*, 304.

debate, during which time the suffrage division of the Women Workers assistance Department passed a resolution in favor of the Soler project.[710]

Soler's project elicited almost no opposition at first. The version of the project that came before the Senate on August 21 1946 differed in its language from the original Soler project, though not in its content, in order to clarify the extent of the law.[711] The debate, now including the entire Senate, again incorporated many of the familiar arguments. Some senators discussed the historical importance of women, their contributions to civilization, and the lack of biological imperative to deny them rights while reaffirming their distinct role in society. Others focused on the modern necessity of the vote with references to foreign laws and to San Juan, celebrating women's moral qualities and denying the threat of a war between the sexes.[712] The debate also included the first signs of the coming political contest for control of the suffrage issue. One peronist senator referred to the earlier failed projects, arguing that they had failed because at that time "egoism mattered more than rights."[713] The suffragists also came in for their share of criticism, Senator Soler compared them to caged birds that would not fly when the door was opened.[714] There were also signs of opposition to the project, as one senator questioned whether or not women could be elected to office, and another tried to further delay debate on the project. In

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[710] *Ibid.*, 600, 625-6.

[711] *Ibid.,* V. 2, 29. This draft allowed the executive an additional six month to complete voter registration if needed. Senators Pablo Ramella of San Juan, Diego Luis Molinari of the Capital and Vicente L. Saadi of Catamarca authored this draft.

[712] *Ibid.,* 33-39.

[713] *Ibid.,* 32. These remarks earned the speaker applause from the gallery.

[714] *Ibid.,* 37.

the end, however, the project passed the Senate by a comfortable margin, with applause from the gallery.[715]

The suffrage project received support outside of congress as well but also evoked serious opposition. The mainstream press embraced the proposal but reminded readers that the vote should be accompanied by "an active civic education campaign for women" in order to prepare the new voters.[716] The socialist feminists engaged in a concerted effort to reject the peronista suffrage project. Most suffragists rejected the idea of implementing women's suffrage under the GOU government on the basis that said government lacked democratic credibility. The Perón regime, they argued, was also "of a totalitarian cut" and lacked legitimacy.[717] To the socialists, there was little doubt that support for suffrage amounted to little more than a cynical attempt to amplify the Peronist movement and Evita's power:

> Why does he [Perón] want to mobilize the population and create a movement around a cause that has already been won and to which there is no opposition? Could it be that this is a way of mobilizing women with the definite end that could well mean the enlargement and reinforcement of electoral clout for a lady with aspirations to a candidacy? History will tell.[718]

The socialist feminists did not limit themselves to written criticism but also made efforts to mobilize women against the government. Alicia Moreau de Justo worked tirelessly to win women over. In June of 1947, the Socialist Women's Center held a conference to discuss their political strategy in the face of what

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[715] *Ibid.,* 43, 29-31, 47.

[716] "El sufragio femenino," *La Nación,* 23 August 1946.

[717] "La mujer socialista," *La Vanguardia,* (suppl.) 21 January 1947.

[718] "La mujer frente a problemas actuales," *La Vanguardia* (suppl.), 11 March 1947. See also "La Unión de Mujeres Socialistas organiza jiras por el interior," *La Vanguardia,* 22 October, 1946.

appeared to be the inevitable triumph of the peronist suffrage project.[719] They aimed to convince women voters that the Socialist party had always had their best interests at heart. The events of September 1947 proved that these efforts could not to stop the peronista juggernaut.

The House of Deputies had stalled over the suffrage proposal in the meantime. As with the Senate, members of the House proposed suffrage legislation shortly after Perón's inauguration. In fact, three projects came forward on the same day, and each one was sent to the Constitutional Affairs Committee. The authors of these bills each mentioned the 1932 project, and the peronists noted that corruption that had blocked earlier passage.[720] Despite this strong beginning, all the proposals remained in the Constitutional Affairs Committee.[721] Perón included women's suffrage in his first five-year plan, presented to the Deputies, but by March of 1947 the authors of the suffrage projects were still calling on the committee to bring the legislation before the House.[722] It appeared that women's suffrage would meet the same fate as in 1932- defeat by neglect. However, Evita's efforts as an organizer soon proved to be equal to the task of pushing through this legislation.

Evita had had sufficient time to rally the peronistas for the final push towards suffrage. On September 3, 1947, peronistas gathered in the Plaza del Congreso bearing placards, waving portraits of Perón and Evita, and chanting

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[719] *Conferencia nacional de mujeres socialistas, Junio 5, 6, 7, y 8 de 1947*, CEDINCI, Box c-88; *La vanguardia* (suppl.), 8 April 1947, p. 2.

[720] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados *Diario de sesionesde 1946*, v. 1, pp. 98-9, 105-7, 122.

[721] *Ibid.,* V. 3, 304.

[722] *Ibid.* v. 10, 757; Juan Domingo Perón, *Obras completas,* v. 8 (Buenos Aires: Fundación pro Universidad de la Producción y Trabajo, 1997), 192-3.

slogans.[723] Within the chamber of deputies, José Visca reiterated Perón's statement of support for suffrage and reminded his colleagues that nothing in Argentine law prohibited women from voting. Deputy Eduardo Colom used the demonstrations to urge his colleagues to address the issue immediately.[724] Nevertheless, the members of the Radical party insisted that such a profound reform required more considered debate. These opponents insisted that the House await the report of the constitutional affairs committee. In the process, Radical leader Ricardo Balbín made clear the partisan nature of the issue. "We will give women the vote in its poplar sense, not in its 'descamisado' sense," Deputy Balbín said.[725] However, the Radicals could not deny a motion for a special session to consider the matter, and so the peronists moved forward with their plan.[726] The demonstrators outside did not react well to the delay. The peronista press denounced those responsible, and plans commenced almost immediately for further rallies.[727]

The 9th of September saw the final debate over the suffrage law, during which so many deputies wished to speak that a motion passed to close debate, over the strenuous objections of the Radical party delegates.[728] However, with the exception of a suggestion to make the female vote voluntary, rather than mandatory as it remained under the Sáenz Peña law, the chamber demonstrated

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[723] "El voto femenino deberá tratar diputados en la semana entrante," *Democarcia,* 1 September 1947; "La sanción del voto femenino solicitose ayer," *La Nación,* 4 September 1947.

[724] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de sesiones de 1947,* v. 4, p. 44, 68.

[725] *Ibid.,* 77-9.

[726] *Ibid.,* 89, 98.

[727] "Millares de mujeres fueron al congreso," *Democracia,* 4 September 1947; "La señora de Perón se hará presente el martes en el congreso," *Democracia,* 7 September 1947.

[728] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones* 1947 V. 4, p. 248-9. The delegate making the motion put the speaker list at "over fifty". Voting for both this motion and the motion of September 3 fell along party lines.

overwhelming support for the project, voting for it unanimously in principle.[729] The debates themselves did not add any new arguments to the issue, and the partisan aspect appeared more muted. However, a few peronist deputies did make sure to acknowledge Evita's role in leading the women of the nation, expressing confidence that her leadership would guarantee the success of women's suffrage in practice. Evita herself capped the final success of the suffrage project, entering the chamber to enthusiastic applause following the vote.[730] Again, the peronistas had organized a large turn-out for the occasion, and the sometimes restless crowd received the news of the project's success warmly.[731] All that remained for women's suffrage to become a reality was Perón's signature, which he provided with due ceremony on the 23rd of September, 1947.[732] After nearly half a century of effort, the goal of the suffragists had become a reality, though in a manner other than what they would have preferred.

Conclusion

[729] *Ibid.,* 227-8, 249. In the Argentine congress it was the custom to vote for a law in general before voting on each article in particular. During the voting for articles in this case there was dissent, but the general reading received unanimous support. In spite of the long sessions, there were still those that felt that "more care and reflection on certain aspects of this reform" should have been exercised, see "El voto femenino," *La Nación*, 11 September 1947.

[730] *Ibid., 218, 245*; "Fué convertido en ley el proyecto de voto femenino," *La Nación*, 10 September 1947.

[731] "Registraronse escenas de gran entusiasmo frente al congreso," *Democracia,* 10 September, 1947, p. 1; "El voto femenino es obra de la revolución," *Ibid.;* "Fue recibida con gran júbilo la señora de Perón," *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[732] Servicio Internacional Publicaciones Argentina, *The Women of Argentina,* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1952?), 41; "La ley del voto femenino ha sido promulgado," *La Nación,* 24 September 1947; "En la plaza mayor se promulgo la ley que otorga derechos políticos a la mujer," *Ibid.*. According to *La Nación*, the enthusiasm of the crowd turned to rioting later that night.

In the years following the signing ceremony in the plaza de mayo, both anti-peronists and peronistas continued to use suffrage as a means to dispute their political agendas. Critics of the regime divided their arguments, sometimes asserting that Perón had taken too long to bring about suffrage, others that he had acted with undue haste.[733] These critics, many of whom were feminists, failed to unite their efforts in opposition to the law. Feminists, in particular, had a difficult time explaining why they opposed a reform that had been central to their agenda in years past. Even had they overcome this rhetorical reversal, feminists had never enjoyed widespread working class support. The material benefits Perón provided combined with the personal connection between Evita and working class women proved an irresistible combination. Perón wanted the support of working class women, something no male political leader had ever sought, and many women responded to his calls for support. In later years,, peronistas used the suffrage law to prove that the nation benefited from Perón's government and from Evita's efforts.[734] The legacy of peronsita feminism therefore remained secure. Despite the best efforts of the suffragists, it was the Perón administration that reaped the benefits of the final success of women's suffrage legislation.

The debate over suffrage served as one part of the next important phase of the feminist movement- the campaign to organize women voters as a political force within the nation and to address their issues within the system. In this campaign, feminists and anti-feminists alike would determine the validity of their predictions regarding the consequences of giving women the vote. In years past, commentators had predicted that Socialists, the first advocates of suffrage, would win the most votes from women out of "gratitude." The case of San Juan

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[733] Alcira de la Peña, "¡Por la voz comunista en el parlamento!," *Mujeres Argentinas,* num. 38, 1 February 1948, p. 1; "El voto femenino," *La Nación*, 11 September 1947, p. 6.

[734] "Historia de luchas y esperanzas," *El Mundo Peronista,* 2:31, 15 October 1952, p. 25.

demonstrated that women did indeed support the party that gave them the vote. Perón certainly must have counted on this precedent, but he did not bank on it. In the aftermath of the 1947 victory, Evita undertook the creation of a new institution designed to cement female support for her husband's regime- the Peronist Women's Party. This party served as both a conduit for female political activity and a means for controlling the newly enfranchised female population. The party not only secured Perón a victory in his 1951 re-election, but also provided women with their first experiences in national office.

Illustration 11- Lucila de Gregorio Lavie at the Inauguration of the DTAM. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 12- Pro-suffrage rally, September 1947. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Chapter IX
Consolidating Victory- The Peronist Women's Party, 1947-1955

> For a woman to be a Peronist is, before all else, to be loyal to Perón, subordinate to Perón, and to have blind faith in Perón!
>
> -Eva Perón[735]

> Each woman should realize that her obligations have increased, because the State, by authorizing these rights, has at the same time the need to demand that every mother be a teacher for her children, that in her house she build an altar of virtue and respect, that she be involved in public life, defending that part of the society that is the home itself, which must be made sacred.
>
> -Juan Domingo Perón[736].

The establishment of women's suffrage created a new realm of political expansion for Peronism. While women had abundant opportunities to bear witness to and express support for Peronism before 1947, they now enjoyed the opportunity not only to vote but also to become full political actors for the first time in the nation's history. Evita, the most prominent figure of Peronism next to Juan Perón himself, appeared to be the obvious choice to lead the newly active woman in the world of politics. Furthermore, as the symbol of the ideal Peronist woman, she provided a model for the political novices who joined the Peronist Women's Party (Partido Peronista Femenino- PPF) and insured their loyalty to and unity with Peronism. Women's political activism, which in other countries represented a radical advance, in Argentina became simply another part of Perón's support base, and the efforts made to increase female political participation reflected the desire to increase that base.

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[735] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos, 1949-1952* (Buenos Aires: Megafón, 1986), 71.

[736] *La mujer ya puede votar* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de informaciones, 1950), 16.

Over a six-year period, the PPF came to hold an integral role in the Peronist political machine. Two years after the suffrage law, the Peronist party formally created the PPF in a woman's congress headed by Evita and her hand-picked delegates. The party expanded rapidly, establishing headquarters in every community throughout the nation. In 1951, the first national election in which women participated, saw a massive female turnout and the election of the first women to Congress, all of them from the PPF. Despite this triumph, the PPF also faced considerable setbacks. Evita, who had briefly enjoyed the nomination for the Vice Presidency, began a long decline in her health that ended in her death in July of 1952. This setback for the party, however, did not prevent it from increasing its presence in Congress, and by the time of Perón's overthrow in 1955 the PPF controlled almost one-third of the Peronist delegation. This impressive accomplishment served to confirm both the highest hopes of the personistas and the worst suspicions of the old suffragists who identified the 1947 law as a cynical attempt to shore up an illegitimate regime.

While some Peronists may have denied their opponents' accusations that the women's suffrage law was merely a ploy to win votes, the facts suggest that the women of the nation did indeed remember the source of their new rights.[737] In the presidential election of 1951, women made up 48 percent of the electorate, yet their turnout to the polls exceeded male participation- 90.32 percent of eligible women voted vs. 86.08 percent of male voters. Of those women, nearly 64 percent, or 2.4 million, voted for Perón, numbers that almost exactly mirrored his margin of victory, whereas about 61 percent of male voters sided with the Peronists.[738] This impressive showing, however, did not come about without

[737] In this chapter, the word "Peronists" shall refer to all followers of Perón in a gender-neutral sense. The term "Peronistas" will denote female Peronists, specifically members of the Peronist Women's Party (PPF).

[738] Estela dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1989), 59-66. Of the remaining female vote, 30.8 percent voted for the UCR, 2.19 percent for the

help. Evita created a new organization- the Partido Peronista Femenino (PPF), displaying the same energy and attention to detail that she had in creating and administrating the Eva Perón Foundation. The Party united the various Peronist women's political organizations under one banner. Through this organization, Evita and her followers worked tirelessly to advance the Peronist cause among the women of the nation. In the process, they also provided an avenue for women to participate in the operation of the Peronist State, allowing women, for the first time, to serve in the national congress. Thus, much as the Eva Perón Foundation had served to unite social services, the PPF served to unite and channel Peronist efforts, while at the same time allowing rank-and-file Peronists a means for achieving their own goals. Much as the Foundation had displaced earlier charitable organizations, the PPF became the central means by which women could enter the traditionally male-dominated realms of government and politics. In this way, the PPF accentuated the rivalry between the peronistas and the suffragists.

In addition to reinforcing the Peronist base and enforcing loyalty among peronistas, the PPF also represented the first opportunity for women to serve as elected officials. The PPF therefore set an important precedent for female political participation within Argentina. However, strict party discipline limited the ability of PPF senators and delegates to operate as autonomous agents within the political system. Evita had control over every appointment and candidate in the party, and preferred to name women with little or no prior political experience. Independent action on the part of party members often brought stern reprisals, including expulsion from the party. The PPF, in short, did not come together as a

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Partido Democrata, 0.7 percent voted communist, 0.6 percent voted socialist; David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 304-5; Carlos Alberto Floria, *La mujer argentina en la política* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1972), 13-5. Perón had won 52.4 percent of the vote in 1946, and the Peronists won 61.38 percent of the vote in local and congressional elections1948. In 1954, Peronists secured 62.96 percent of the vote, compared to 31.64 percent for the UCR.

group of women that supported Peronism, but rather as a creation ordained by Evita and her husband, one that they intended to use as a political tool to bolster their control. Nevertheless, the PPF also served as a means to convey the desires of the rank and file to the leadership. Through the various headquarters of the PPF, the peronistas provided services to the community. These services included many of the spheres of activity addressed by earlier feminists, including childcare, education, and social centers.[739] While the PPF did not allow for the sort of political participation suffragists had hoped for, it did continue the tradition of community outreach practiced by feminists and political parties.

The Peronist Women's Party succeeded in bringing together women in a political movement of unprecedented scope based on a charismatic bond- a top-down movement, rather than an organic mobilization of women. "Charismatic", in the case, will be used in the Weberian sense of the term as refined by Douglas Madsen and Peter Snow. These authors define charisma as "an influence relationship marked by asymmetry, directness, and, for the follower, great passion." "Asymmetry" refers to a relationship in which the leader exerts "profound influence on the attitudes and behavior of the follower" but that the reverse is not true. "Directness" indicates that there is little mediation between leader and follower, and "Great Passion", in this case, signifies the "intense devotion and extraordinary reverence for the leader" shared by the followers.[740] The members of the PPF clearly exhibited a charismatic relationship with Evita. The basis for such relationships can be found in a personal crisis of "self-

[739] The Confederación General de Trabajo served a similar purpose both politically and socially. Perón tried to use the CGT as a way to enforce loyalty and discipline among workers, but members of the CGT did not always cooperate with this goal.

[740] Douglas Madsen and Peter G. Snow, *The Charismatic Bond: Political Behavior in Time of Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5. See also Jorge A. Ramos, *Revolución y counterrvolución en la Argentina,* vol. 5, *La era del bonapartismo, 1943-73* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1973), 212-3.

efficacy", a feeling of doubt in one's ability to fulfill basic needs and a resulting willingness to place one's faith in a leader imbued with special qualities.[741] Evita's ability to fulfill these needs for her followers contributed to the success of her movement.

This strength of charisma that allowed the Peronist Women's Party to blossom also led to a crisis of feminism in Argentina. As the PPF grew in power, it marginalized rival feminist voices- particularly those that had initiated the suffragist movement. As a charismatic movement, the PPF began to enter into the period of routinization, that is, the process of institutionalizing a personalist organization.[742] Before this could be accomplished, however, Evita's death provoked a crisis of leadership in Peronist feminism, and Perón's overthrow in 1955 finally terminated the only substantial female political organization in the nation. The PPF, while it succeeded in bringing women into politics, also obscured alternate political voices for women. The insistence of Peronist feminism on subordination to one faction in national politics made it vulnerable, making it unable to survive the collapse of the Perón regime. It would be decades before the women's movement recovered from this collapse.

Evita and the Development of Peronista Feminism

The ratification of the suffrage law in 1947 represented a significant milestone for the feminist movement and a major victory for Perón's administration. However, the vote had never been the ultimate aim for either suffragists or the Peronists, but rather a means to an end. Now that women had the legal right to political equality with men, feminists faced the task of organizing

[741] Madsen and Snow, *The Charismatic Bond.,* 13.

[742] Madsen and Snow, *The Charismatic Bond,* 25-9.

women voters into an effective force in the public arena. For the suffragists, this meant mobilizing women in support of existing parties. The Peronists, at first, followed a similar pattern- independent women's leagues sprang up around the nation between 1947 and 1949 in support of Perón. In doing so, however, they actually posed a threat to one of the fundamental values of Peronism- unity. As we saw in the previous chapter, Peronism at its root was an ideology of absolute unity, and the uncoordinated nature of these small political clubs ran counter to that doctrine. The creation of a single political organization for women therefore became an essential task for the Peronist system. Evita, easily the most prominent woman associated with Peronism, naturally took on this task of eliminating what must have appeared to herself and her husband as a dangerous potential for chaos within the movement.

While explaining the necessity of consolidating existing women's groups, the need for unity does not clarify why Evita found it necessary to create a women's party that operated separately (if not independently) from the men's party. Indeed, the very concept of a women's party seems to contradict the unity doctrine. The explanation for this strategy is three-fold. First, by creating the PPF, Evita further distinguished her brand of feminism from that of the suffragists. In Perón's words, she "represented the nerve center and true sense of the Peronist woman." In order to secure the political benefits of women's suffrage for her husband, given the time between the passage of the law and the first election in which women could participate, Evita created an institution that constantly reminded women of their special role within the "New Argentina" of Perón. Second, by establishing a distinct party, Evita reinforced her own role as a political leader within the Peronist movement. As a party leader and, later, as a candidate, Evita increased her importance as a collaborator with her husband. Perón himself highlighted this aspect by pointing out that through her work Evita "could organize on the basis of true values that Peronists consider necessary."

Finally, by creating a second party, the Peronists could run two slates of candidates for elected positions, thereby allowing them to secure an unbeatable majority in Congress. The women's party thus created "an organization supported by…the self-denial and sacrifice that each Peronist woman puts into this effort to advance our cause throughout the Republic."[743] The implication of this last rationale for women was that it guaranteed female participation in politics and government with minimum of opposition from men who were not fully ready to accept women in leadership roles.

While the creation of a women's party was not unheard of, this action nevertheless demonstrated one of the chief differences between Evita and the earlier suffragists. The only women's party prior to 1949 was Julieta Lanteri's party of the 1910's and 1920's. As with the PPF, strong personal leadership had held the Feminist Party together, and the absence of that leadership created a crisis for the party. In Lanteri's case, however, the party had served chiefly as a means of publicity for the feminist cause, whereas Evita clearly had a non-feminist political agenda to advance through the PPF. Specifically, the PPF served as a method for the constant popular mobilization on which the Peronist movement depended. As a populist movement, Peronism- particularly in its earliest phases- did not have a fixed or clearly defined feminist ideology beyond its commitment to respond to the needs of "the people," both economic and political. Through mobilization of voters, Peronism could not only respond to those needs, but also shape its members perceptions of those needs.[744] Perón therefore approved of the PPF as a way not only to encourage participation in his movement, but also to perpetuate and make permanent that participation. He

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[743] Juan Perón, *Dijo Perón a las delegadas censistas* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de informaciones, 1951), 4.

[744] Nestor Ferioli, *La fundación Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1990), 23.

phrased his rationale for this distinct mobilization in terms familiar to those involved in women's issues at this time. "For these doctrines of human solidarity" he declared, "the woman is the best preacher one could choose, for she begins teaching the child in the cradle to feel this solidarity, without which life often is not worth living."[745] Perón's vision for women in politics therefore continued the notion of separate spheres for men and women. Men's political role included participation, administration, and decision-making. Perón defined women, on the other hand, in terms of education, indoctrination, and support- all traditionally maternal roles. Perón reiterated this point whenever he spoke of the PPF, praising it for bolstering the overall movement, and reminding his audience that "the perpetuation of the movement is more in the hands of the women than of the men."[746] Evita seconded this vision, declaring that women "should sacrifice themselves" and that "we women should act in close collaboration with men…following the path that general Perón has showed us."[747] The Peronist version of feminism therefore exalted and upheld the maternal role, expanding its influence and activity into the political sphere as a means of mass mobilization. Perón awarded women who best exemplified the maternal roles with citations such as the "Medal of Motherhood", the "Medal of Peronist Faith" and the "Medal of Self-Denial", further reinforcing the association between virtues traditionally linked to women and their role in Peronism.[748]

Evita's predecessors in the campaign for suffrage, in contrast, upheld the notion that in a democracy all groups must be represented equally, and

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[745] Juan Perón, *Dijó Perón a las delegadas subcensistas*, 5.

[746] "Lo mejor de Perón," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1 November 1951, 1:8, p. 26; "El Partido Peronista Femenino," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 December 1954, 4:78, p. 3.

[747] *Eva Perón señala el camino del civismo a las mujeres argentinas* (Buenso Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950), 6-7.

[748] "Presencia de la mujer argentina," *El Mundo Peronista*, 3:53, 1 November 1953, p. 35.

therefore the recognition of subordinate rights for a particular group was anathema.[749] Nevertheless, these first activists had recognized the dangers women faced when entering the realm of party politics. Alicia Moreau de Justo believed that women could and should "give their support to the highest and most dearly held beliefs and present a healthy and almost incorruptible support" for their party. However, she also recognized that the lack of experience of most women made them vulnerable to manipulation.[750] In order to protect themselves, Blanca Cassagne Serres had exhorted women to educate themselves and to rid themselves of their "low or excessive ambition."[751] However, she also advised women voters to study particular candidates or issues carefully, and when in doubt how to vote "we should consult serene men and women; those that don't go to political meetings or committees, because the state of reflection appeals to them more", advice which, assuming it could be followed, might still lead the voter astray.[752] Despite all these pitfalls, Moreau nevertheless vigorously rejected the idea of a women's party for the simple reason that it seemed ludicrous to her that there would be issues that affect women only. She gives as her example the issue of maternity leaves for working women, an issue that certainly affects women a great deal. But Moreau reminds the reader that even in issues of child care, a variety of professions are interested in its practice and in its impact on society.[753] Despite the prominence of largely female-only organizations prior to

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[749] Blanca Azucena Cassagne de Serres, *¿Debe votar la mujer? Cultura Civica Femenina* (Buenos Aires: Editor Licurgo, 1945), 47-8.

[750] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *La mujer en la democracia* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1945), 100-107.

[751] Cassagne Serres, *¿Debe votar la mujer?,* 14.

[752] Cassagne Serres, *¿Debe votar la mujer?,* 26.

[753] Moreau, *La mujer en la democracia,* 101. Moreau specifically lists doctors, sociologists, writers, journalists, labor leaders, and politicians (but not factory owners) as interested in the issue of childcare. It is perhaps an unintended consequence of this listing that Moreau, by

winning suffrage, early feminists nevertheless clearly saw themselves as integrating into existing political structures as quickly as possible once the vote was theirs.

This contrast between the Peronista strategy and suffragist practice highlights another important distinction between these two branches of feminism- Evita's central, personalist role in maintaining the loyalty of the Peronist base. By crafting a high-profile leadership position for herself, Evita essentially doubled the support base for her husband, while their marriage guaranteed that she could not use the political support she gathered to challenge him. After all, as vital as she was to Perón, without him she lacked any basis for her own prominence. The years between the election and 1949 saw Evita taking on the roles that had allowed Perón to rise to the top in the first place. In this way, she secured her husband's position while allowing him to divert his attention to other matters.[754] Her specific role was that of arbiter between her husband and his working-class support base. Evita took up residence in Perón's old office in the Secretary of Labor, despite having no official position there herself. This alone symbolized her status as a stand-in for her husband, and she proceeded to demonstrate the efficacy with which she wielded her unofficial authority. Her almost daily sessions in the Secretatiat blended her function as labor representative and head of the Eva Perón Foundation.[755] Workers coming to visit her always received what favors they sought, no matter the cost, and Evita usually gave them additional goods as well. Her energy and enthusiasm in this philanthropy (or

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naming all of these professions as interested parties in addition to women, implicitly excludes women from their ranks.

[754] Ferioli, *La fundación*, 23.

[755] Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón* (New York: W.W Norton and Co., 1996),83-4; Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón: aBiography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 149-50.

largesse, as some might regard it) became legendary to both her supporters and detractors. Regardless of the response this quality evoked, it undeniably contributed to her mystique. As one observer put it, "one of Eva Perón's characteristics was her extreme nervous energy, and one of her virtues not being able to control it."[756] In this way, Evita established herself as a dynamic and effective public figure.

Evita's special relationship with the men and women played an equally important role in her future as a political leader. Evita, herself a woman of working-class origins, already enjoyed considerable popular esteem as a "Cinderella"- a virtuous but humble woman who had succeeded in getting ahead. Evita made the most of this position, playing the part of "woman of the people" to its maximum extent.[757] In her speeches and writings, she constantly reiterated the point that she had not forgotten her origins and would continue to make sure that her husband didn't forget her origins either. "Protocol," she declared in one speech, "and the costumes of our country, would have allowed me the path of least resistance, of inertia, vanity…ignoring the state of the lowly…" but she would not permit this of herself. "I am Evita for all those that need me, and instead of any position of privilege I prefer to fight in the street…."[758] At the same time she portrayed herself as a humble assistant to Perón, that is, she depicted herself as being no different than any other wife helping out her husband, even if she did so in a setting that was anything but domestic.[759] Finally, she

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[756] Ibid., Julia Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón y el invisible rol políticofememnino en el peronismo, 1946-52* (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, 1986), 13-4, 28-9.

[757] Milcíades Peña, *Masas, caudillos y elites: la dependencia Argentina de Yrigoyen a Perón* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Fichas, 1973), 108-9; Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 78.

[758] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos, 1946-48* 32, 77.

[759] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos,* 130-2.

underscored the exalted position she held as an intermediary figure between the president and his people. Perón, in this view, "is not a politician; he is a cause, the cause of the people" while she "from the humblest post within Peronism tries to interpret and imitate General Perón." The net effect placed Evita in an essential, not to say indispensable, role. Indeed, "when she died it was like Perón lost his arm," as one Peronista put it.[760] But to fulfill that role, she would require the full support of a dedicated group of women. The Peronist Women's Party fulfilled that purpose by making women's political participation possible and controllable through strict organization.

The first challenge for the Peronistas was to overcome the reluctance of most working class women to become involved in politics, a challenge with which earlier feminists had struggled for decades. Social mores circumscribed the public role of women, limiting them to the care of the home.[761] When women did hear about politics, as one member of the PPF later recalled, it was second hand. As she remembered, "My father and my brother often discussed politics…every night my older brother and my father (talked), but nobody could conceive that we (women) might say something." According to these same memoirs, women themselves often reinforced this limitation of female roles. "My sisters, until they were married, were always like subjects of my mother…I wanted at all costs to be something, to do something," said this Peronista, "[but]…my mother wouldn't let me." Indeed, the "woman who wanted to go there, to the union, to the street was not…well looked upon…the few women who got involved were seen as being

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[760] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos,* 285; *Eva Perón habla a los gobernadores de provincias y territorios nacionales* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950), 3; James, *Doña María's Story*,83.

[761] Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1988), 109-110.

contaminated."[762] This testimony suggests the lack of political experience among those who eventually formed the core of the PPF and reveals the difficulties in attracting working class women to any political cause. However, the Peronistas would prove equal to this challenge. Working class women clearly embraced both Perón and Evita as both leaders and role models, and rapidly joined the early Peronist women's clubs.

Peronist women's organizations, at first, seemed to work along similar lines as their suffragist predecessors. The earliest examples of participation had a spontaneous and disorganized quality to them, a natural consequence of the lack of political or labor organizations that appealed to women at that time. As one Peronista later recalled, this early participation in public political displays took on a festive air. "The enthusiasm was so great that my boyfriend and I went to the demonstrations," she testified, "It was our date." This informality extended into the campaign for women's suffrage. Another Peronista recalled that she arrived at the demonstration outside the Congress "without knowing by who's design…but we went along with it and we arrived there and we were some five thousand, ten thousand, in the plaza shouting for hours and hours 'we want the vote, we want the vote!'"[763] This suggests that underlying the appeal of Evita or Juan, women joined the Peronists for social support or as an opportunity to engage in previously barred public activities.

As Evita gained prominence through her public appearances and work in the Foundation these unorganized initiates in political activity rapidly found a focus around which they could gather. As one of these new Peronistas explained "I became a Peronist when the figure of Evita appeared in the daily papers…she

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[762] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 117-9. Most of the Peronist women the authors interviewed for this work preferred to remain anonymous; James, *Doña María's Story*, 222.

[763] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina.,* 133.

was our feelings incarnate. I felt overwhelmed by that figure." Indeed, at times "she almost…surpassed Perón, people were forgetting their leader because she was leading such splendid humanitarian campaigns."[764] Many of these women agreed, at least in hindsight, that making the party single-sex was also a good idea, reflecting that Evita "has separated us from the men because it is the men who decide how to do everything. We had to decide things for ourselves."[765] Furthermore, their testimonies reveal that the members of the PPF, at least, had accepted Evita's image as both a nurturing and dynamic leader. Peronistas remembered and celebrated "her maternal love, above all for her most disadvantaged children- single women, the elderly, the 'humble'- was in fact the ultimate cause of her action and sacrifice."[766] In this light, Evita's formation of a single women's party seems almost inevitable, and given her own increasing presence in her husband's state and the emphasis Perón placed on increasing his base of support, perhaps it was. In any case, it was clear that Evita had the necessary authority, both within the Peronist State and among working class women, to create such a party.

The PPF's delegates fulfilled an essential role in the Peronist power structure. Just as Evita performed a critical function as an intermediary between Perón and his supporters, so the hand-picked delegates became mediators between Evita and the people. "We were the bridge between her and the workers", recalled one Peronista.[767] While Evita's held full control over the operations of the PPF, the delegates certainly received the benefits of their

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[764] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 134; James, *Doña María's Story, 77.*

[765] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 161. It should be noted, however, that the PPF was not entirely single sex. Juan Perón was technically a member, allowing him to run for president on both the regular Peronist Party and PPF tickets.

[766] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina.,*138.

[767] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina.,*170.

association with her. Through their "missionary" work, the Peronistas enjoyed new opportunities that had been beyond their reach.[768] As a result, PPF agents could obtain recognition and honors for themselves, particularly after Evita's death. The Peronista press put the delegates forward as models of the sort of civic-minded women that the Peronist government desired. Their articles depicted PPF delegates and sub-delegates acting as caretakers to entire communities, travelling among their neighbors as agents of goodwill.[769] Through the PPF Perón and Evita created an effective mechanism for enhancing their political base. They intended the PPF to serve a vital political role that would allow Peronism to survive in power. However, the party also proved beneficial for those that participated in its activities.

The Peronist Women's Party: From Formation to Election

By 1949, Perón had reached the height of his power. His rivals were in disarray, the economy surged in the wake of World War II, and his control of the politically machinery appeared secure. However, there were also signs of weakness. The post-war prosperity began to fade, and with it went the good will he had earned with the working class. Furthermore, the, at times, heavy-handed methods used to silence his enemies, including censorship and intimidation, alienated some of his former supporters and isolated Argentina internationally. Perón therefore had cause for concern about his political strength and a motive to bolster his power through institutional changes. These changes included a re-write of the Constitution and the creation of new organizations that answered to him. Perón's female constituency played an important role in this process.

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[768] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón*, 42-4.

[769] "La amiga de los changos," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 April 1955, 4:84, p. 9; "Por lealtad y gratitud a Perón y Evita," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 January 1953, 2:36, p. 6-7.

Rather than trust that gratitude for suffrage would guarantee him the female vote, Perón, with Evita's help, created a new political party that would transform ordinary women in Peronists agents. This was the Peronist Women's Party.

Prior to the creation of a formal political structure for women, Perón placed women's suffrage and legal equality with men among the provisions of the new constitution of 1949. Perón's opponents, consistent with their criticisms of the regime to that point, viewed the constitution as another power-grab from one who desired "the disappearance of any concept of division of powers [and] the complete and utter abrogation of all individual and collective rights and liberties."[770] The opposition objected to the removal of presidential term limits, allowing Perón to run for re-election in 1951. The Peronists, unsurprisingly, portrayed the constitution as a progressive document that among other things abolished the last remnants of colonial-era laws regarding women and upholding female health care as a concern of the State.[771] Evita, as usual, came forward as one of the most vocal advocates of the constitutional reform, explaining why Argentines and especially women ought to support the new constitution. She noted that women could not directly participate in the constitutional convention due to the obstruction of Perón's opponents and the neglect of earlier governments. Nevertheless, she declared that women would support the new constitution for it would confirm "the most valuable popular conquests" including the full inclusion of women in public life.[772] In the end, the opposition failed to block the constitutional reform, and the new document reaffirmed women's suffrage. Having firmly established the legal basis for female political

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[770] Ignacio Palacios, 24 January 1949, *Diario de sesiones del la convención nacional constituyente,* 20.

[771] Servicio internacional publicaciones argentinos, *The Women of Argentina* (Buenos Aires; n.p., 1952?), 43-4.

[772] Eva Perón, *Clases y discursos completos, 1946-52* (Buenos Aires: Megafón, 1987), 246-7.

participation, it now remained for the Peronists to provide the structure for that participation.

The formation of the PPF did not happen overnight, regardless of the devotion many women increasingly showed Evita. She herself claimed to be surprised at the Party's growth, declaring that the party "was born and grew, like my social aid work and my union activity: little by little and more by force of circumstances than by my decision." It is certainly true that Evita already had quite a lot to keep her busy. Yet immediately following this statement she addresses her critics, saying "this [assertion] is not what many will imagine to be the case…but it is the truth."[773] Once again Evita carefully maintained her image-ready to help her husband's cause wholeheartedly, but without seeming overly eager, either. Nevertheless, the comparison she draws to her involvement in other endeavors is not unjustified, since it did evolve gradually, making use of women Evita had gotten to know in other contexts. It was not until July of 1949 that Evita brought together 3500 delegates in Cervantes Theater in Buenos Aires for the inaugural convention of the PPF. This event coincided with the regular Peronist Party conference, providing a perfect launching point for the Women's Party.

The Peronist party congress of 1949 provided an excellent opportunity for the Peronistas to prepare for the work of organizing women voters. Fresh from the victory of the revised constitution, the Peronist party as a whole began with a massive gathering in Luna Park. Six thousand men and women gathered to hear Perón, Evita, and various party and government officials speak amid great

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[773] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Relevo, 1989),191. Those close to her often remarked on her seemingly boundless energy with a mixture of admiration and concern for her well-being (Dujovne Ortíz, *Eva Perón,* 230).

fanfare.[774] During his address, Perón reminded his followers of the purpose of the Peronist Women's Party:

> A famous physicist once said 'give me the right lever and I will move the world.' And I now say: the people of Argentina, by giving civic rights to women, has given her the lever with which to move the world. But we must remind the ladies that in order to move the world with a lever one must learn to manage it very well and intelligently.[775]

Perón used this speech to remind his listeners that it was his administration that had helped them, and he expected their loyalty in return. Evita would revisit Perón's thinly veiled hints during the first meeting of the Peronist Women's Party.

The next day, Evita provided the means by which the women of Argentina would learn to manage this lever. The delegates overwhelmingly voted to establish the PPF with Evita as its leader, formalizing the organization. The speeches of the women delegates to the conference reinforced this act of devotion- they swore oaths of loyalty to Evita and her husband, declaring that "our hopes and our faith in the future belong to you."[776] For her part, Evita made a point of reassuring her listeners that "I do not want the English feminist that is against men." Instead, she reaffirmed the connection between her brand of feminism and the principal Peronist theme- "We do not want conflict between men and women. We want absolute spiritual unity."[777] These sentiments did not

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[774] "Comenzaro a llegar hoy los delegados a la gran reunión peronista," *Democracia*, 22 July 1949 (The Eva Perón Foundation provided housing for the female delegates),; "La comunidad Peronista," *Democracia*, 25 July 1949; "Fue imponente la asamblea Peronista," *Democracia,* 26 July 1949.

[775] "Gobernar es dar al país objetivos firmes y perdurables," *Democracia*, 26 July 1947.

[776] "Deliberó la asamblea femenina," *Democracia*, 27 July 1947; "Las delegadas juraron fidelidad al general Perón y a su esposa," *Democracia,* 29 July 1949; "Presidió la asamblea la esposa del jefe de estado," *Democracia*, 28 July 1949.

[777] "Definó Eva Perón la misión de la mujer en el partido," *Democracia*, 28 July1949. According to the article, the audience responded to these remarks with vociferous cheers and applause.

differ greatly from those of those expressed by the suffragists, who shied away from using the word "equality" to define their goals. Almost every Argentine feminist disavowed war between the sexes and called for greater collaboration between men and women, though on a more equal basis than had been the case previously. Such attitudes defined what it meant to be a feminist in this time and place- feminists accepted that women had a specific social role, and acted to defend and enhance that role. Arguments over leadership and policy distinguished the suffragists from the Peronistas, much as it had divided the suffragists themselves.

The suffragist reaction to the Peronist Women's Party followed a pattern similar to their response to every aspect of Perón's rise to power. As we have seen, the suffragists at this time formed part of the organized opposition to Perón, whether they did so as socialists, radicals or conservatives. Perón's opponents regularly denounced Perón's methods and policies as either grandstanding populism or as in violation of the nation's political and legal traditions. Evita, unsurprisingly, came in for her fair share of these objections and accusations. Perón's critics, as they so often did when it came to Evita's activities, readily denounced the PPF as yet another illegitimate extension of Peronist power. Part of this objection, as we have noted, originated in the concern that the creation of a second Peronist party might result in a Congress where both the majority and minority were made up of Peronists, an assertion that proved prophetic.[778] This critique added a more concrete element to the older complaint that a separate women's party destroyed the true goal of women's suffrage- to equalize men and women as citizens. As always, Evita

[778] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón,* 30-1.

largely disregarded these critiques, repeating her accusation that the old-style feminists sought to "masculinize" the women of the nation.[779]

While deflecting these critiques, Evita and other Peronists neglected to mention another reason for the creation of the party- the proliferation of small Peronist women's groups, all of which dissolved, more or less willingly, with the rise of the PPF. These groups, such as the Unión Femenina Peronista, the Asociación Peronista Pro-Derechos de la Mujer, or chapters of the so-called Centros Femeninos María Eva Duarte de Perón, all presented a special problem to Peronism.[780] These groups clearly supported the expansion of Peronism. Yet their very existence, uncontrolled by any of the political or governmental organs of the State, were an implicit threat to the unity and structure so cherished by Peronism. This potential challenge of factionalism was, perhaps, what Evita meant by the "force of circumstances" that led her to found the party. The core of the party, hand picked by Evita, reflected this need to keep the existing female Peronist groups in line. The 22 "delegates" whom Evita had sent throughout the country to organize the party headquarters in each province came from a variety of backgrounds- teachers, lawyers, nurses, wives of politicians, even a tango singer- and most had worked for the Foundation in one capacity or another. But what truly united them was that none of them had any previous direct experience in a political organization of any kind. Furthermore, Evita personally reviewed each important personnel choice these delegates made for their districts, and inevitably favored loyalty to her above political experience. Evita essentially acknowledged this to be the case when she remarked that the first delegates were known to her as "fervent Peronists at every moment, as fanatics for the cause of Perón" prepared to "abandon the home, abandon work, to leave behind

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[779] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 193.

[780] Dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 43-4.

practically an entire life" for their new mission.[781] This meant that the Peronista delegates had to violate the notion of women remaining in the home while promoting that notion among the women of the nation.

The chief method the delegates and sub-delegates used to organize women and encourage their participation was the creation of the "unidades básicas", the local chapters where party members met, took classes, discussed issues, or sent requests for aid to the Foundation. By 1952 there were 5500 unidades básicas across the country housing more than 500,000 members.[782] Evita claimed that the party took the form that it did because "only women will be the salvation of women".[783] Given the abandonment of the earlier Peronist women's organizations created by the women themselves, one must question whether or not she truly believed that statement. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the unidades clearly demonstrated the demand among women for the sorts of services that the PPF could provide. Indeed, it is likely that working class women came to the unidades primarily to make use of the social and educational services they provided, rather than out of any ideological devotion. Evita, for her part, recognized this tendency and sought to couple their social outreach with political indoctrination. The "descamisados", she believed, "do not yet distinguish between the political organization I lead and what I do in my Foundation." She therefore encouraged the PPF members at the Unidades to pass along workers requests to the Foundation. This connection reinforced the link between Peronist doctrine and Evita's social aid, reinforcing the former through an activity

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[781] Eva Perón, *la razón de mi vida,* 210. Once again, Evita shows the strange gap between the ideal role of women as guardians of the domestic sphere and her pride in these women who assert themselves publicly for Peronism.

[782] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina.,* 61-4; Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón.,* 34-5.

[783] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida.,* 209.

commonly linked to women.[784] Perón laid out this strategy when he described the unidades as places "to meet, indoctrinate, teach theory and methods of execution in an atmosphere of friendly camaraderie."[785] The party's guidelines echoed this statement with the ambitious goal of "upholding the ideal that every citizen in the nation's electoral rolls be affiliated with Peronism" and even directed local party leaders to keep tabs on those who refused to join.[786] Perón, who wished to present a benevolent image that often conflicted with their political agenda, had to maintain the balance between the unidades as political centers and as providers.

Nowhere was this conundrum more evident than in the operation of the unidades básicas. As was often the case with the Peronistas, the development of the unidades drew on traditions and techniques that the suffragists had already tested. The Consejo Nacional and the Socialists had actively pursued the creation of adult learning centers and day care facilities that targeted working class women. The PPF, however, enjoyed resources far greater than those available even to the Sociedad de Beneficencia, and could therefore reach a far larger segment of the population. The Peronistas made sure that the unidades possessed the best facilities available. An account of one such Unidad provided a lavish description of its daily activity and resources. For example, it refers to the patio that had been converted into a "true sports field and playground." Inside, the facility contained a medical clinic equipped with the latest instruments, childcare facilities, and classrooms where members learned sewing and other crafts. The sub-delegate that ran the unidad made a point of minimizing the political nature of the facility. "Our unidad básica is not a type of committee, but

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[784] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida,* 212; Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón*, 36.

[785] "El general Juan Perón habló ante delegados partidarios," *Democracia,* 26 July 1949.

[786] Consejo Superior del PPF, *Organizacón, reglamento y funciones de la secretaría política del PPF* (Buenos Aires: PPF, 1955), 7.

rather a home," she declared, emphasizing that their work there was "for the people." But the partisan nature of the unidad básica could not be denied, as affirmed by a reporter who witnessed a lecture on the benefits of Perón's second five-year plan that began with a homage to Evita.[787] The Peronistas strategy in operating the unidades básicas was not to deny politics, but rather to direct female political activity a certain way. The female Unidades Básicas were designed to emphasize "instruction and teaching all those disciplines that may favor women." Meanwhile, men had their own unidades where they could "develop their activities through doctrinal struggle."[788] In this way, the Peronists redrew the line between male and female activity in the public realm.

For Evita, the unidades were the pride and the vital foundation of all of her organizations because "Perón wanted…the political centers of Peronism- to be focal points of culture and useful action for the Argentine people. My centers, my unidades básicas fulfill Perón's desire."[789] The unidades básicas, Evita felt, were a second home for many women, which was necessary to attract women.[790] In doing so, Evita hoped that women would learn to teach children "from the cradle…that one must love Perón as one loves one's mother and the Homeland."[791] As teachers and agents of Peronism, Evita once more

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[787] "Creación de Evita," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 February 1953, 2:39, p. 19; See also "Evita las quería así…un unidad básica bonaerense," *El Mundo Peronista,*15 November 1953, 3:54, p. 34-5; "Focos de amor y de simpatía," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 July 1952, 2:25, p. 20-1; "Un rincón maravilloso," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1 October 1952, 2:30, p. 11.

[788] "El moviemiento peronista trabaja por el pueblo," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 September 1955, 5:92-3, p. 22.

[789] Eva Perón, *La razón de la vida*, 211.

[790] *Eva Perón habla a los gobernadores de provincias y territorios nacionales* (Buenos Aires, Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1950), 8.

[791] Silvia Guivant, *Ibid.,* 37-8.

reemphasized the traditional roles of women even as the unidades básicas created an alternative to being a housewife for many of them.

The delegates and sub-delegates who operated the unidades básicas acted as extensions of Evita, modeling their activity after her by being both active politically and yet submissive to the program of Peronism. More specifically, the delegates submitted themselves to Evita's direction. As with the Foundation, Evita immersed herself in the day-to-day operations of the party, "there was no part of it that she left to chance." Evita could be very strict, not to say authoritarian, in her management of the party- those who sought any measure of independence within the party were immediately accused of being ambitious and were blacklisted. This too the old party members acknowledged in their recollections, but not with bitterness. As one delegate recalled, "we were very young and not well prepared," and as another recalled "the lady [Evita] had to be strong to direct a female movement. She had to have character…she was discipline incarnate." Such testimonies only underscore the degree to which "it was the figure of Eva Perón that led us to work for Eva Perón." Whether they believed, as some did, that she had "saintly qualities" or was a "supernatural being" or merely that "she was a nervous, energetic type" her magnetism and political skills nevertheless held together the membership of the Party. This is not unusual, given that many of these women had not had previous experience as politicians, and without Evita might not have had any reason, and perhaps not even the opportunity, to participate in party politics.[792]

As with other Peronist organizations, the personalism of the PPF gave it unity of purpose and a degree of efficiency as well, but it also created problems. One's position in the party had to do precisely with one's closeness to Evita herself, and therefore talent was not necessarily prized. Indeed, it might even be

[792] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 135-6, 153-67.

a detriment, as an overly talented and successful delegate could be labeled "ambitious" and have her career capped. However, talent and personal connections with Evita were both necessary for a woman of that era to move ahead through the PPF. Having the backing of such a powerful organization must have been a great comfort for those women bold enough to stand for congressional election. As one of them later remarked, "A failure by a woman would not be forgiven. Men can fail and sometimes be reelected. But a woman fails and other possibilities are closed to her."[793] And Evita did indeed show a great deal of interest in looking after the well being of the delegates. "She was very easygoing in her relations" one delegate recalled, "she was always asking us 'girls, are you well? are you at ease? Are you O.K?' always, always, always when she came to see us." Evita made sure that this familiarity did not breed contempt, however. One delegate explained that she, like many of her compatriots, was "in the habit of calling her 'the lady' because I think that by saying 'the lady' we all know who we're talking about."[794] The rank-and-file Peronist might be able to call her by the affectionate nickname "Evita", but those who worked closely with her remembered that she was the boss.

In submitting to Evita's will, however, members of the Party reaped benefits as well. First of all, in her work with the delegates she acted as a teacher, instructing her followers to remember "to always be at the service of others and not expect that others serve us."[795] In this way, the delegates learned politics, as well as getting an opportunity to travel throughout the country, making contacts and building up the reputation of the party by integrating its services with the Foundation. But most importantly, they came to be recognized as

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[793] *Ibid.,* 171.

[794] *Ibid.,* 151-2.

[795] *Ibid.,* 175.

interpreters and potential intermediaries that Evita provided, much as Evita herself had positioned herself as the intermediary between Perón and the people of the nation. As one delegate aptly put it "we were bridges between the lady and the workers." PPF delegates modeled themselves after Evita in every way and could therefore expect to obtain a measure of her authority in the nation.[796] This influence also meant that they were in a position to prepare women for political activity, which was one of the common goals of Peronists and anti-Peronists alike. Delegates took their responsibilities very seriously, going door-to-door to recruit new members and to form the nucleus of the unidades básicas. Their stated purpose in doing so was to educate women in what it meant to be able to vote, and in this way "women…began to realize that they were now on another level. She could act, she could be something."[797] This disciplined action by PPF delegates, the degree to which they exerted themselves to reach out to their communities, and the connection made between social action and political campaigns, all provide solid training for the would-be politicians as well as building a groundswell of support for their political message. "The unidades básicas were mobilized…they worked a great deal," one delegate recalled, "For that reason many people went to them, because they learned things there, because they didn't just talk about politics."[798] The Peronistas used the tactic of appealing to the concrete needs of its membership base, and it paid off once again.

Evita, the delegates, and the unidades all formed part of a strict hierarchy that kept the Women's Party running. The unidades básicas, as their name implied, represented the lowest tier in the structure of the PPF. Each Unidad had

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[796] *Ibid,* 170.

[797] *Ibid,* 186.

[798] *Ibid,* 198.

a sub-delegate to administer its daily operations, and these sub-delegates, in turn, answered to the delegates for their particular province or territory.[799] Evita, as we have seen, had hand-picked these delegates, and also controlled the appointment of the sub-delegates. She kept a careful eye on the activities of these party officials and constantly assured them that "if one sacrifices oneself assisting our cause, you may come to be the future director of the PPF."[800] Such declarations reflected the primary means for advancement of the party- devotion to the cause. The delegates, for their part, seemed to respond to Evita's drive and energy, recalling how she left "nothing to chance" and that her presence "made up for some deficiencies" that may have hindered the young party.[801] Individuals did not have complete control over the party, however- a series of committees reviewed the different aspects of the party's operations. Of these, the most important was the Political Secretariat, which approved the creation, operation and termination of the unidades básicas, regulated membership in the party and directed political indoctrination within the party. Delegates who served on the national committee (and sub-delegates who served on the provincial committees) represented the most prominent party activists. Therefore, they were the ones most concerned with, and most scrutinized for loyalty to the party and to Peronist doctrine.

Loyalty within the party came to be the most prized virtue of its members. Perón had, from early in his career, emphasized the need for absolute unity "in the integral preparation of the country including all the lively forces and activities of the nation."[802] Evita frequently reiterated this point in her remarks, defining

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[799] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón,* 34-5.

[800] *Eva Perón señala el camino del civismo a la mujer argentina,* (Buenos Aires: n.p. 1950), 5.

[801] Bianchi and Sanchis, *El partido peronista femenino,* 153, 166.

[802] Juan Perón, *Apuntes de historia militar, parte teórica*, (Buenos Aires: Circulo Militar, 1934), 139.

what it meant to be a true Peronist: "In order not to be an oligarch, but rather a good Peronista, we have to ground ourselves in profound love for the people and for Perón, sustaining spiritual values and a great spirit of sacrifice and self-denial."[803] The unidades and the PPF delegates therefore acted as guardians of loyalty, serving to constantly revive the fervor and faith of the people. Peronist publications, naturally, constantly exhorted readers to reaffirm their commitment to the cause, reminding them that "indoctrination can never be put aside, even at the busiest times, nor can it be turned into a routine task."[804] In addition to the indoctrination lessons available at the Unidades, party members actively sought ways to guarantee the success of Perón's vision. One Unidad, for example, sent out inspectors to local businesses to verify their compliance with five-year plan guidelines.[805] The most prominent party activists fully embraced the idea of loyalty and its connection to self-denial. As one delegate recalled, "if we realize that we were becoming ambitious, then we have ceased to be Peronists."[806] This created a paradox for those who might wish to rise through the ranks of the PPF-in order to advance, one had to appear as if she did not wish to advance. While not all Peronistas followed the dictates of the Party without question, access to the upper ranks depended on conformity.[807]

Party disciplinary proceedings reflected the practical consequences of the tension between enthusiasm and self-denial for members. As with much of the

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[803] Eva Perón, "Historia del peronismo capitulo IV los pueblos en la historia: el espiritu oligarca," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1:5, 15 September 1951, p. 46.

[804] "Guia doctrinaria," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 March 1954, 3:16, p. 41. The editors of *El Mundo Peronista* made the magazine available, free of charge, to every Unidad Básica.

[805] "¡Ya estamos trabajando," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 June 1952, 2:23, p. 44.

[806] Bianchi and Sanchis, *El partido peronista femeninio*, 204.

[807] James, *Doña María's Story*, 67 and 98-9.

party's operations, Evita made the final decision on these matters, especially when it came to the decision to expel a member of the party. Officially, she resisted the role of disciplinarian, protesting that confronting a dispute between party members "causes me great pain" and she reminded her followers that "two sisters may fight, but they remain sisters."[808] However, she also pointed out that anyone who complained that they had been passed over "has thus demonstrated why they were not chosen."[809] Complaint or independent action therefore served as the two primary causes for dismissal from the party. Despite Evita's selection process she said one had to deal with those who "behaved in a way that was not conducive to the group…they were accustomed to working in a totally independent manner in the neighborhood."[810] Peronistas who were labeled "caudillas" because they "were no longer acting as delegates of the lady" or who otherwise found it difficult to enter into "total subordination," said one former delegate, might find themselves utterly cut off from all contact with the party.[811]

Of equal concern to Evita were the obstacles within the existing Peronist structure. In her autobiography, she noted that several provincial *caudillos*, the majority of whom, she claimed, were from "the old opposition parties" but who included some Peronists, tried to control the PPF branches in their districts. While she attributes the continued "independence" of the PPF to her delegates, presumably the backing of the Peronist State also helped keep the PPF out of the hands of local political bosses.[812] Furthermore, not all working class women responded positively to the PPF's recruitment efforts. The delegates later

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[808] *Eva Perón señala el camino…*, 6.

[809] Eva Perón, "Compañeras," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 October 1951, 1:6, p. 5.

[810] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 179-80.

[811] Bianchi and Sancis, *El partido peronista femenina,* 179-80.

[812] Eva Perón, *La razón de mi vida.,* 210-1.

recalled that many older women "did not consider that women ought to vote" and out of fear of participation closed the door in their faces. Married women, too, seemed to be resistant to political participation, a fact which one delegate attributed to the influence of their husbands rather than any genuine disinterest.[813] Members of the PPF even had violent encounters with opposition parties. One confrontation with a group of women socialists led by Alicia Moreau de Justo even ended with shots being fired after one of the socialist women shouted, "how can you have a woman who was a whore as the leader of a movement?"[814] The very fact of Evita's leadership, therefore, made it impossible to attract women that had devoted themselves to the women's rights movement.

The First Test of the PPF

The proof of the PPF's success came in its participation in the election of 1951. As we have already seen, women participated in great numbers in that election, outnumbering male voters in their turnout to the polls. This tremendous participation redounded to the benefit of the PPF, as they came away with impressive victories not only in the provincial assemblies, but also in the national Congress. The full slate of PPF candidates- 23 deputies and six senators- won their elections.[815] This strong presence increased in the 1954 election- the last before Perón's fall from power- despite Evita's death. In that year, the PPF came to hold one third of the total seats in Congress, fulfilling the fears of the opposition parties. Such a strong showing by female candidates was

[813] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 187-8.

[814] Bianchi and Sanchís, *El partido peronista femenina,* 190-1.

[815] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón,* 52-3. For the full list of names of PPF candidates in the 1951 and 1954 elections, see dos Santos, *Ibid.,* 65-9.

unprecedented in Argentina and indeed was remarkable by almost any standard in that day and age. Women would not be so well represented again until the 1980's in Argentina.[816] Although their ability to function independently in Congress might have been curtailed by their obligations to Evita and Perón, the success of the PPF is a testament to the abilities of the women who formed its core membership.

The basis for this overwhelming success began with the presidential campaign of 1951. The PPF, while a women's party, did have one male member- Juan Domingo Perón. This allowed the PPF to complement his nomination as the male Peronist party presidential candidate with their own nominations. Perón's re-election bid therefore served as the heart of the PPF's election activities. As to the election of other positions within the government, Evita once again highlighted the sole criterion: "When the moment to choose the men and women that will make up the movement's list for the coming election arrives, we will not wonder about names, *we will only ask one question: if he or she is an authentic Peronist*."[817] Once again, loyalty to Peronism, rather than ability or experience, determined the likelihood of individual advancement within the party. This standard made any objections from male Peronists irrelevant- if a man did not want women to serve in office, then he was not a good Peronist. Female candidates in many cases replaced earlier Peronists that had objected to the decisions of the administration. At the same time, Evita made sure to remind women that they owed the right to vote to Perón, and should act accordingly:

> It is time to organize the struggle for Perón's great victory. For that reason we women feel a great responsibility; because in this first female participation in political matters we must demonstrate to the country that we are worthy of the right that we have thanks to

[816] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 68-71.

[817] Eva Perón, "Una consigna por el movimiento femenino peronista," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1:1, 15 July 1951, 1:1, p. 5. Emphasis in the original.

> Perón. Because we want to be worthy of that right we have decided, from the outset, not to enter into the petty and disgusting personal ambitions that always characterize the activities of political parties, and have embraced Perón as…the only leader of Argentine women.[818]

Even candidates had to keep a low profile within the PPF- the party leadership would countenance no distraction from Perón's re-election.

The specific campaign strategy Evita set for the PPF reflected the heavy emphasis on Perón himself. Evita called on party members to seize every opportunity to "make known the truth of Perón" and reminded them that "no Peronist woman should permit that anyone even attempt to smear the *name of Perón*"[sic]. She even suggested slogans that Peronistas should use, including "The women of Argentina support no one except Perón", "No one but Perón", and even "Our lives for Perón." Evita set a goal for each PPF worker to earn at least one vote for Perón every day, working "for each vote as if our victory depended on it." Evita left no doubt of her confidence in Perón's success, but an ample margin of victory would "prove to the entire world how much we love Perón."[819] The Peronistas responded to these urgings with the zeal that had become the hallmark of their organization. The unidades básicas now doubled as campaign headquarters, an easy step from their role as centers of "political education" and of patronage. Peronistas performed all the tasks associated with an election campaign- organizing speeches and rallies, distributing campaign literature, and preparing for the logistical requirements of the election itself. In the process, they helped pave the way for what could have been Evita's greatest triumph- the national party rally of August 22, 1951.

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[818] Eva Perón, "Una consigna por el movimiento femenino peronista," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1:1, 15 July 1951, 1:1, p. 5.

[819] Eva Perón, "Diez consignas para la mujer peronista," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1 August, 1951, 1:2, p. 29; Eva Perón, "La mujer peronista," 1 September 1951, 1:4, p. 5.

The formal purpose of the rally was to officially inaugurate Perón's reelection campaign. Evita described it as an opportunity for "the people of Argentina to express their sovereign will" and declared that "we will remain in the Plaza de Mayo until Perón agrees to keep leading us."[820] It was Evita herself, however, who became the center of attention at this rally. Following Perón's acceptance of the presidential nomination, the Party moved to declare Evita its nominee for the vice presidency. Evita at first demurred, but in the end accepted the nomination.[821] Her reaction, though likely staged, nevertheless provoked outrage from a sector that Perón could not ignore- the military. Himself an officer, Perón relied on the backing of the armed forces as a pillar of his regime. The leaders of this institution, while embracing many of Perón's policies, simply could not accept the possibility of a female head of State. Their reaction to the nomination, while hidden from the public, forced the Perón's to reconsider Evita's candidacy, and less than two weeks after the rally she announced to the public that she would resign her candidacy. Unknown to anyone at the time, her health also contributed to this decision.[822] The cancer that eventually claimed her life had already made it presence felt, and Evita's physical decline increasingly limited her effectiveness as a political leader.

Publicly, Evita's resignation required skillful handling, since she had to provide a reason for her decision without revealing the true motives behind her choice. In her official statement, Evita reproduced the rhetoric she used to urge PPF members to loyalty and selflessness:

> If my efforts have conquered the hearts of the workers and of the humble of my nation, that alone is an extraordinary reward that

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[820] Eva Perón, "Una sola consigna: el 22 de Agosto," *El Mundo peronista,* 15 August 1951, 1:3, p. 5.

[821] Eva Perón, *Discursos completos, 1949-1952*, 350-2.

[822] Fraser and Navarro, *Evita*, 147-9; Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón*, 266-7.

> obliges me to continue with my work and my struggle. I do not want any honor other than that love. To accept anything else would break the code of conduct that moves my heart and give credibility to those that do not believe the sincerity of my words, and who can no longer say that all I have done was for selfish and egotistical personal ambition.[823]

This apparent selflessness, however, masked another setback for women's political activism in Argentina. Not long after the resignation announcement, Evita informed the party that "we cannot have nor do we want more than a place in the struggle". Therefore, while the original plan for the congressional election called for an equal number of candidates for all the available positions from the PPF, the male Peronist party, and their allies in the General Labor Confederation (CGT), the PPF would now submit a smaller list of candidates. While Evita held out the hope that these women would "prove that we are capable of sustaining the banner of Peronist ideals with dignity and honor in any place and in any post", this reduction nevertheless signified a disappointment for the party.[824] Evita's political skill clearly had its limits. While the PPF demonstrated the possibilities of female political participation in Argentina, many sectors of society still balked at the notion of women as equal partners in government.

While the failure of Evita's vice-presidential candidacy proved to be detrimental to the party and to her own goals, the PPF nevertheless enjoyed a considerable measure of success in the 1951 election. While the number of female candidates did not measure up to the original intentions of the party, those women who did run on the PPF ticket all won their races, including 6 senators and 23 deputies. Equally important, from the point of view of suffragists and peronistas alike, women proved their enthusiasm for voting, as turnout

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[823] *La historica decision de Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaria de Informaciones, 1951), 5.

[824] Eva Perón, "Compañeras," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 September 1951, 1:5, p. 5; Eva Perón, "Comapñeras," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 October 1951, 1:6, p. 5.

among women exceeded that of men. Finally, women proved to be more supportive of Peronism than men, as 63.9% of female voters chose Perón. The other parties that ran female candidates, including the socialists, failed to elect any of them. More than anything else, this triumph of the Peronistas demonstrated the inability of the suffragists to command a popular following. Even veterans of women's politics such as Alicia Moreau de Justo proved unable to fulfill their electoral hopes. The Peronista candidates, on the other hand, won purely on the basis of their connection to the PPF- none had participated in any sort of political activities before, a decision Evita made to prevent the possibility of an independent power base for any one Peronista. While this may have denied some talented women access to power, it was consistent with Evita's concern for unity and loyalty.[825] In any event, the PPF was not shy to celebrate its victory and to give the credit to Evita, referring to the margin of victory as "the miracle of Eva Perón".[826]

Despite the success of the party, the PPF nevertheless faced a serious challenge in the months following the election. On election day, Evita cast her ballot from a hospital bed. Her illness had continued to progress, and despite periods of recovery, it became clear that she would not last long. In July of 1952, cancer finally claimed her life. As the nation mourned, the PPF faced the need to fill the void she had left. During her illness, the central role she played became evident as the PPF declared that it would cancel all of its public events until she recovered. PPF workers recalled the feelings of despair that gripped them during this period, while also reaffirming their determination to continue working hard for

[825] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón,* 52-3; dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas* 59-66; Vera Pichel, Vera Pichel, *Delia D. de Parodi: una mujer en el congreso* (Buenos Aires: Circulo de Legisladores de la Nación Argentina, 1998), 73-4; James, *Doña María's Story*, 187-90.

[826] "Fantasias de la oposición," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1 February 1952, 1:14, p. 39.

her and for Perón.[827] Following her death, the party did its best to retain Evita's physical presence in order to benefit from her legacy. The PPF made it known that people could still send letters to Evita that would be delivered to her grave. Naturally, the party also made a point of reminding the nation of Evita's role in freeing women "continually chained, awaiting their hour" of political participation.[828] The PPF leadership clearly had no difficulty making use of the loss of their chief in order to bolster the standing of the Peronistas. In their remarks in Congress, for example, Peronistas declared that "our beloved leader is immortal and at the same time irreplaceable." At the same time, they promised to "follow her example, asking only for a place in the fight, in order to prove that in great revolutions the movement is everything and the individual nothing."[829] This seeming contradiction of describing Evita as irreplaceable while asserting that individuals are insignificant reflected the strategy that Evita had employed for years. The PPF, as Evita had done, would disavow ambition and the notion of any selfish agenda, referring to a higher authority in all of their actions- Evita's widower. The PPF added Evita herself to this approach, wielding her name and reputation as a constant reminder of their important role within Peronism. Evita's death, while depriving Peronism of its most eloquent spokesperson, provided the Peronist political system and the PPF with a powerful symbol.

The outpouring of grief following Evita's death demonstrated her continuing power as a symbol of Peronism and female virtue in Argentina. In the days following her death, mourners surrounded her offices at the Eva Perón Foundation and at the Secretary of Labor with flowers. Tens of thousands of people attended the funeral march through the city, and her body remained on

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[827] "Jirones de su vida," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1:9, 15 November 1951, p.24-5; Bianchi and Sanchis, 177-8; Fraser and Navarro, *Evita*, 154-63; Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón*, 267-77.

[828] "Cartas para Evita," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 August 1952, 2:27, p. 18; "El alma del calle," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 August 1952, 2:27, p. 35.

[829] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1952,* v. 2, p. 770.

display in the CGT office for the remainder of Perón's presidency. In the following years, a wide variety of memorials appeared in public facilities ranging from schools and hospitals to cities, bays and even a province. Meanwhile, portraits and busts of her appeared in union halls and cultural organizations across the country, and Perón developed plans to construct an enormous monument in her honor.[830] Peronist publications contributed to these memorials through the regular inclusion of letters and poems from their readers. These submissions often took the forms of prayers, asking "Saint Evita" to allow "Perón to continue at the head of our Argentina for many years". The PPF even sponsored competitions for these authors, awarding prizes to those who best glorified their leader.[831] Whatever other challenges the party faced, Evita retained a powerful presence within the nation and among the Peronistas.

While the memory of Evita remained a powerful force in Peronism, it was not enough to prevent a crisis within the PPF. Factionalism became a problem.[832] At first, like much of the nation, the PPF was united in its shock and grief over Evita's death. In that time, "all the old women, young girls and workers, her humble ones and *descamisados*, cried in the rain for 16 day without exhausting their frenzy of love and pain."[833] It was not long, however, before grief gave way to ennui among the party faithful. Having lost Evita's firm hand at the helm, the

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[830] "Calendario Peronista," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 January 1953, 2:37, p. 30 (a military patrol in Antarctica named a bay for Evita); "Calendario Peronista," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 May 1953, 2:39, p. 30; "Calendario Peronista," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 June 1953, 2:42, p. 30; "Calendario Peronista," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 October 1953, 3:51, p. 17; Vera Pichel*, Delia D. de Parodi,* 36 (the coup of 1955 prevented completion of the monument).

[831] "Carta a Evita," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 September 1953, 3:50, p. 32; Francisco Compañy, "Significado y Transcendencia humana de la obra social de Eva Perón," in *El arte glorifica a Eva Perón* (Cordba: Edit. Assadri, 1953), 100. See also "Madre Evita," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 May 1953, 2:41, p. 39; "Amigos de Mundo Peronista- acrostico a Evita," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 January 1953, 2:37, p. 10; Julio Ellena de la Sota, *La acción política de Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1953), 13.

[832] Silvia Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón,* 53-4.

[833] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 57.

discipline that had accomplished so much for the party also began to dissolve- "We used to say: 'we must do this, because…the inspector will come'…but afterwards nobody came, we were no longer interested in who might come by."[834] Unlike the Eva Perón Foundation, which had mechanisms in place in case of Evita's death, Evita had not designated a successor to the PPF leadership. This likely served to prevent any one party member from becoming overly ambitious. However, the lack of a clear heir to the throne created a serious leadership gap, and despite the best efforts of the new leaders, internal rivalries continued to plague the PPF.[835]

Delia Degliuomani de Parodi, the ranking PPF member and Vice President in the House of Deputies, the highest position held by any of the Party's candidates, tired to hold the Party together. She, like many of the core PPF members, had a modest education and had come to the Party through her work for the Foundation and the Ministry of Labor, a post she had gotten through her brother in law.[836] Because of her long history with the party and her standing in Congress, she was the obvious choice for head of the party, and she did her best to fill the void Evita had left. But there were many other women in the party who felt capable of leading, and although all still worked for Perón, amongst these women there was much competition to take "the marshal's baton" as one former member put it.[837] In this light, the victory of 1954 seemed more like the product of momentum than any other cause. Still, the fact that the party did remain as a

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[834] Bianchi and Sancis, *El partido peronista femenina,*159.

[835] Bianchi and Sancis, *El partido peronista femenina,*180-1.

[836] Vera Pichel, *Delia D. de Parodi,*12-3.

[837] Bianchi and Sancis, *El partido peronista femenina,* 180-1.

coherent unit is testimony to Parodi's skill as an administrator as much as the lingering strength of Evita as a unifying image.

The PPF in Congress

The internal problems of the PPF limited its effectiveness within the Peronist regime. Despite contributing to a solid Peronist majority in congress, PPF delegates apparently contributed little to the programs Perón developed following Evita's death. The absence of their leader factored heavily in these limitations- Evita had spearheaded all of the Peronist programs related to women up until this point. Furthermore, it is debatable whether Congress had any real power at this stage in Argentine history. Many critics of Perón described this Congress as little more than a rubber stamp for his agenda. Finally, as Evita's own experience in electoral politics had shown, there were clear, if unofficial, limits on female political participation in this society. Regardless of their importance to the stabilization of the Peronist State, the PPF could not immediately overcome long-held attitudes towards women. Therefore, they continued to play a supporting role in politics while maintaining a relatively low profile. As a result, many of the issues that feminists had long wished to address did not come to the forefront of the Peronist agenda. When they did, it was Perón, not the PPF, that brought them up.

From their first day in Congress, the Peronista legislators made clear their intention to follow in the path Evita had set out. In the Chamber of Deputies, the PPF statement made a "proclamation of our eternal gratitude to Eva Perón, who knew how to give us this place that merits our dignity as women in the New Argentina, just, free, and sovereign, of Perón." In the Senate, the PPF issued a call to unity for the entire nation, asking all citizens to put aside the rancor and

mistrust "that rises in the bosom of all the vipers of the earth."[838] For PPF congresswomen, this unity generally meant supporting, but not initiating, legislation. Very few of the laws passed between 1952 and 1955 originated with the Peronistas, and for the most part the participation of female legislators came only in the form of speeches supporting a particular law. Given this limited form of activity within the government, it is not difficult to understand the critique of Perón's opponents that Congress served no real purpose.

The cases in which women did initiate legislation in the national congress reinforced their roles as supporters. Foremost among these were proposals for memorials in honor of Evita. As discussed above, numerous organizations and individuals continued to honor Evita's memory after her death, and congress was no exception. Particularly in the first year in Congress, the peronistas devoted the bulk of their efforts to honoring their fallen leader. Peronistas regularly gave speeches commemorating special events in her life, such as her birthday and the anniversaries of her death and her brief vice-presidential nomination. The PPF legislators also advanced projects to construct monuments to her and rename certain public facilities in her honor, as well as make her autobiography *La razón de mi vida* a required textbook in the nation's public schools.[839] As time went by, this initial focus on Evita diminished, but never disappeared. Funding for the Eva Perón foundation, homages to her on the floor of the Senate or Chamber of Deputies, and creation of new institutions in her honor remained common concerns for the Peronistas in congress. However, other concerns also began to occupy the Peronistas, and PPF legislators contributed to discussions on issues of agricultural policy, taxation, and foreign policy. Female legislators, however,

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[838] "En nombre del pueblo," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 May 1952, 1:21, p. 34.

[839] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1952*, v. 3, p. XXVIII-LXXVIII; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1952*, v. I, p. XIX-XXIX.

rarely initiated these laws, participating primarily through discussion in the committees and full assemblies of the two Chambers.[840]

During their tenure in congress, the PPF legislators also had occasion to discipline one of their members through expulsion. Dominga Isidora Ortiz de Sosa Vives, representative of Santiago del Estero, found herself obliged to resign from the chamber of deputies in 1954 following her expulsion from the PPF. While she presented her resignation of her own accord, she made it clear that her decision came from her being on the losing end of an internal power struggle. She began her remarks by reminding the Chamber that she had earned her post "by the grace of God, the will of Perón and Evita, and the choice of the noble and dignified people of Santiago." However, because the party leadership had decided to expel her "classifying me as 'traitorous and disloyal'", a label she vehemently denied.[841] The Radical party legislators, picking up on this dissent, opted to reject her resignation, citing a "conflict of conscience" that had nothing to do with the will or ability of Sosa Vives.[842] The Peronists, on the other hand, made the argument that the people had created a "National Doctrine" and that those representatives that identified themselves with the people were obliged to uphold that doctrine. Failure to do so meant that an individual was no longer fit to represent the people.[843] In the end, her colleagues accepted the resignation. This incident demonstrated that the Peronistas maintained the standards of

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[840] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1953*, v. 4, p. XXIX-XCI; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954*, v. 4, p. XXXIII-LXXIX; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1955*, v. 2, p. XXIX-LVII; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1953*, v, 2, p. XVII-XXVII; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1955*, p. 1, p. XXVI-XXXIII.

[841] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954,* v. 4, p. 2430.

[842] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954,* v. 4, p. 2431.

[843] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954*, v. 4, 2432;Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954*, v. 1, p. XXXIII.

loyalty that Evita had imposed, and ambition within the party could result in serious consequences.

Despite this public display of disunity within its ranks, the PPF continued to gain ground within Congress. By the end of Perón's presidency in 1955, the PPF had achieved its original aim of holding one-third of the Peronist seats in Congress. Peronistas in congress saw a corresponding rise in their access to positions of importance on committees. Delia Parodi even obtained the position of vice-chair in the Chamber of Deputies, while Ilda Leonor Pineda de Molíns became second vice-president of the Senate.[844] In the elections for these and other candidates, Peronistas continued to make the usual rationales of loyalty and "honoring the sacred memory of Evita" in order to make their case.[845] However, they also made arguments familiar to the suffragists. In choosing a candidate, the Peronistas claimed, "men put in the balance motives and pretexts beyond the reality of daily life." Women, on the other hand, "paid attention not to words, but to actions."[846] In other words, the Peronistas portrayed themselves as being more in touch with the needs of the home, granting them a political, if not moral, superiority to men. While continuing to reject the legitimacy of the early feminists, the Peronistas nevertheless continued to draw on their predecessor's rhetoric and techniques to advance their agenda.

In the last years of Perón's regime, the Peronistas also took on an institution that had been a target of many left-wing suffragists- the Catholic Church. During his first presidential campaign, Perón enjoyed the tacit support of the Church, which instructed the faithful to support only candidates who had rejected the legalization of divorce, a position that excluded Perón's opponents.

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[844] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954*, v. 4, 2432.

[845] "Hablan las mujeres de la Nueva Argentina," *El Mundo Peronista,* 1 April 1954, 3:62, p. 6-7; "Habla 'el hobre de la calle,'" *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 March 1954, 3:61, p. 22.

[846] "La voluntad del pueblo," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 May 1954, 3:64, p. 36.

Perón developed his relationship with the Church by supporting Catholic education in public schools. The Peronistas, always supporting their leader, therefore matched the conservative feminists in their allegiance with the Church. Towards the end of Perón's presidency, however, a rift appeared between him and the Catholic Church. This division, fueled by the nation's economic struggles, prompted him to include the Church among the oligarchs who had always opposed him. The only difference, in his opinion, was that "this time it appears they have chosen a different place to prepare that same revolution they have been dreaming of" since he had come to power.[847] The Peronistas whole-heartedly embraced this explanation. During a PPF rally, Delia De Parodi remarked that Evita had warned that Perón's enemies would use any tactic they could, and this time "they have decided to hide themselves beneath the guise of men of Christ." In the name of the PP,F she reaffirmed the commitment to follow Perón without question.[848] In their eagerness to take on Perón's new rivals, the Peronistas even suggested that the Church had opposed Perón all along and had harbored resentment of Evita's success with her foundation where Catholic charities had fallen short.[849]

The most dramatic representation of Peronista antagonism to the Church appeared in their support of two measures strongly opposed to Catholic doctrine-legal equality of illegitimate children and full divorce. In the case of the laws granting illegitimate children equal status and rights of those born within wedlock, the Peronistas once again made references to the attitudes of Evita and to the

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[847] Juan Perón, "Síntesis de la actual situación político-clerical," *El Mundo Peronista,* 15 November 1954, 4:76, p. 3.

[848] "Hicieron declaraciones las tres ramas del movimiento," *Clarín,* 26 November 1954, p. 3; "El movimiento responde," *El Mundo Peronista*, 1 December 1954, 4:77, p. 28.

[849] "La doctrina peronista ante la reacción político-clerical," *El Mundo Peronista*, 15 November 1954, 4:76, p. 12.

supposed injustices of past administrations. For example, Peronista Deputy Ana Macri referenced Evita's well-known declaration that children "are exclusively…the privileged of our country." Her colleagues in the Senate echoed these sentiments, and harshly criticized the old Civil Code that placed children in unstable and denigrated circumstances while allowing the parents to forsake their responsibilities.[850] These arguments, as we have seen, were nothing new. Feminists had made the case for legal equality of children years ago. Nor had the Peronists lacked the opportunity to change the status of illegitimate children before 1954, after eight years in power. Their willingness to change the situation simply reflected their rejection of the Church.

Similar attitudes guided the Peronistas' support of absolute divorce. As discussed previously, the Civil Code only recognized legal separation, not the right to re-marry. Perón's alliance with the Church had depended, in part, on his determination to keep the Code as it was. The provisions for divorce in this new law were far from liberal, however. Having completed the complicated judicial process the couple had to wait at least a year before the sentence of full divorce came into effect. Nevertheless, that the Peronistas supported such a law represented a significant change from a conservative attitude to one that echoed the agenda of the socialist feminists. The Peronistas had demonstrated once again their absolute loyalty to Perón, regardless of the consequences.

In the end, faced with a worsening economic crisis and a growing backlash from his confrontation with the Catholic Church, Perón's government collapsed in the face of a military coup in September of 1955. While Perón himself escaped into exile, the institutions of his political organization and many of their leaders remained in Argentina. The immediate consequences of the so-called "revolución libertadora" for the PPF and female political activism was

[850] Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954* v. 3, p. 22105; Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones de 1954*, v. 2, p. 926.

outright repression. The new government, seeking to expunge all memory of Perón from the nation, sought to obliterate all records of his regime, even going so far as to ban the use of certain words associated with Peronism.[851] While making some effort to address the needs of women, this new government's policies led to an overall decline in female political activism.[852] While women did win elections in subsequent elections, the degree of their participation suffered.[853] The PPF was a target for the military-controlled government, and its membership soon became targets for arrest or exile. Many of these women were soon released, however, and came to be part of the underground effort to restore Perón.[854] From his exile, Perón recognized the importance of the connections the PPF delegates had formed over the years, and gave firm instructions to his agents in Argentina to maintain their support.[855] The women who made up the rank and file of this movement were young, with no official connection to the old regime. Through the remainder of the 1950's and the 1960's, these Peronistas worked to restore the party.[856] Through their connections, Peronist women were able to establish bases of operation for the Peronist underground as well as maintain supply lines for the various groups. Peronism had eroded the presence of other feminist leaders from other parties through their efforts to discredit them, and no new ones had the experience or the drive to take on the political realm at

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[851] Dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas*, 74-5.

[852] Carlos Abeijón and Jorge Santos Lafauci, *La mujer argentina antes y después de Eva Perón*, (Buenos Aires: Cuartomodo, 1995), 204-5.

[853] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas*, 96.

[854] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 73—7.

[855] dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 81-2.

[856] Lidia Henales and Josefina del Selar, *Mujer y participación: participación y exclusión* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America latina, 1993), 47.

this time. As a result, female participation in a government faced a setback from which it would not fully recover until the 1990's.

Conclusion

From the day Perón entered the political arena in 1943, women represented constituency of his agenda and a pillar of his regime. Through Evita, Perón sought to channel female political activity. In order to do so, he required an effective political organization, one that simultaneously expanded the possibilities for women to enter politics while also maintaining strict standards of party discipline, preventing any one woman or group of women from exerting undue influence on the government. In this, the Peronist Women's Party succeeded admirably. Through the PPF, women achieved a presence in government to fulfill the wildest dreams of Julieta Lanteri or Cecilia Grierson. Furthermore, the PPF, through the unidades básicas, provided social services and education on a scale far beyond anything that the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres, the Socialists, or even the Sociedad de Beneficencia could ever have achieved. The unidades, through their strong presence in neighborhoods and communities, reinforced the support of working class women for Perón. Even after Evita herself had disappeared from the scene, loyalty to her and to her husband continued to guide the decisions of the PPF. It is almost impossible, therefore, to distinguish the choices that the party's leaders made from the will of the Peróns.

Despite this seeming lack of autonomy within the party, it cannot be disputed that the PPF succeeded where earlier feminists had failed by attracting such a large following. As we have seen, the PPF did not offer any services that earlier feminists had not provided. While the appeal of social services could be a useful tool, it does not guarantee loyalty by any means. Many women could

simply have made use of the unidades básicas without feeling any particularly strong attachment to Perón or to Evita. Nor had motivated women lacked opportunities to involve themselves in politics prior to the rise of Peronism. However, it is also the case that women had never before enjoyed the opportunity to legally serve as elected officials in the national government and Peronism, in addition to making suffrage a reality, clearly represented the strongest political organization by 1951. Success breeds success. The feminists, having rejected Peronism from its earliest appearance, became irrelevant to suffrage and feminist organization because Perón had captured the allegiance of male workers from the very parties that early feminists had supported. Any would-be female candidates in the 1950's, therefore, had only one viable option for political activity- the PPF. The price of this access, however, was total compliance, in public, at least, with Perón's direction in all matters of policy. Those that failed to conform found themselves driven from the Party. However, the fear of these consequences conceals the nature of these disputes- it is unclear whether they resulted from conflicts of ideology or personality. Nevertheless, they represent deviations from the Peronist ideal and remind us that not all of the Peronistas embraced the ideology of the party wholeheartedly.

Perón's successful limit on congressional authority further restricted the potential of the female Peronistas to make a significant impact on national politics, and the collapse of the Peronist state represented the end of women in elected office for years to come. Nevertheless, Perón's willingness to include women in his political coalition represents a triumph of feminist arguments, if not of the suffragist leaders. Perón, anxious to expand his political base, would not and could not have included women if it had meant alienating his existing allies. That institutions such as organized labor, the military and the Church all accepted, or at least tolerated, female political participation demonstrated that the

feminists had at last made themselves heard on this issue. As Evita's short-lived candidacy proved, the extent of this participation had definite limits. Nevertheless, the precedent of female political activism and participation now had firm roots, and as long as electoral democracy existed in Argentina, women now had a right to inclusion in the process of government. Furthermore, the training and organization that was Evita's legacy to the core members of the PPF had opened new possibilities for many women in Argentina. "Eva Perón made it possible for women to hold high office" one member later recalled "Eva Perón gave us that chance. Because in addition to the conquests of the Women's Party, through Eva Perón, one is not limited by one's origin, but rather all women are included, whatever they might think."[857] Evita's efforts, then, had succeeded in opening up the possibility of political participation of all women in Argentina.

[857] Bianchi and Sanchís, dos Santos, *Las mujeres peronistas,* 157.

Illustration 13- Eva Perón at the PPF Congress, 1949. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 14- A woman voter casts her ballot at the first national election, 1951. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 15- Teresa Adelina Fiona opens a unidad básica. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Illustration 16- Juan Perón meets with PPF delegates, September 1953. Source- Archivo General de la Nación

Chapter X
Conclusion

> We have always argued that a democratic society does not deserve that name while women are banned from the ballot box. Approximately half of the population is female and in some countries women predominate. How can governments and parliaments say they represent the people when half of that people cannot make a choice or even express an opinion?
>
> -Alicia Moreau de Justo[858]

> In the new century, women will surely make the journey they need to, because female evolution is irresistible and is evident everywhere, even though [that manifestation] does not always follow the same pattern or has not reached the same point.
>
> -Elvira V. López[859]

Long before the advent of the feminist movement women had played a crucial role in the growth of Argentina, although most records downplayed the extent of that role. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, critical shifts in the economy and population of the nation provided an opportunity for women to assert their political importance. The economic boom, which both depended on and encouraged a surge in immigration, brought both new employment possibilities for women and the ideology to articulate their needs. Furthermore, improvements in education allowed for the development of an elite cadre of women that could challenge traditional notions of women's place in society. At the same time, thousands of women joined the expanding industrial workforce. The combination of critiques of social mores and the presence of a

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[858] Alicia Moreau de Justo, *El socialismo y la mujer* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1933), 11.

[859] Elvira V. López, *El movimiento feminista* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1901), 19.

large female working class that both supported and competed with male workers inevitably forced a reevaluation of long-standing attitudes towards the "weaker sex" in Argentine society. Had a sufficient number of Argentine women united in a single movement, as the founders of the National Council of Women desired in 1900, a massive sea change in gender relations certainly would have ensued. However, conflicts among elite women and the fundamental disconnect between social classes made unity in the feminist movement impossible, slowing the pace of feminist reform to a crawl in the face of male reticence. Ultimately, only the energy and political strength of the Perón regime could the impasse of Argentine feminism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The formation of the earliest feminist organizations contained the potential both to transcend and to fall victim to divisions among women. Dr. Cecilia Grierson, following her visit to the International Council of Women meeting of 1899 in London, recognized the need to bring together women of all ideological perspectives. As a consequence, the National Council of Women included Conservatives, Socialists, and Radicals. The Council made social improvement its foremost goal, advocating salutary legislation and promoting social aid work. However, while the members of the Council agreed on the importance of these activities, differing priorities emerged among the most active women within the organization. Those who adhered to parties that challenged the existing political order favored a model of feminism that emphasized the vote and other rights as crucial. Conservative feminists, on the other hand, claimed that political activism deviated from the true nature of the women's movement- and, indeed, from the nature of women themselves. The leadership of the Council remained in the hands of the Conservative feminists, but they could not impose their vision of feminism on the rest of the membership indefinitely. Within a few years of the Council's creation, new women's political groups formed under the auspices of the Socialist and Radical parties. These groups provided an alternative site of

activity for the progressive feminists. In consequence, the ideological unity of the Council began to erode, finally collapsing in 1910. The backdrop of massive worker unrest in that year shaped this fragmentation while focusing national attention on labor issues.

The problems of the working class often intersected with the challenges facing women as a group in Argentina. Women sought a redress of grievances in the workplace, and faced the dangers of poor public health and alcoholism. Socialist and Anarchist feminists recognized the potential benefits of uniting the labor and women's movements in an effort to reform society. However, feminists who sought to change Argentine laws such as the Civil Code did not necessarily see eye to eye with female workers who wished for more basic and practical improvements in their daily lives. Working class women did participate in political campaigns and, more often, in labor unions or neighborhood groups such as the renters' league that staged the rent strike of 1907. Such working class female activity, while failing to support the aims of middle- and upper class feminists, nevertheless disproved the often-repeated claim that most Argentine women simply did not care about politics or life outside the home. Indeed, extra-domestic activity provoked anxiety among men of all social classes. Working class men perceived working women both as competitors in the job market and as dangerous to male-headed households. Middle- and upper class men focused more on the danger feminism supposedly posed to public morality, order, and health. For all of these critics of feminism, the maternal role always remained the nucleus of their arguments.

For feminists and their opponents alike, the image of motherhood became the fundamental basis for discussions of women's place in society. Maternity provided a common language of shared experience- everyone has a mother and an idea of what a mother should be. In Argentina during the first half of the twentieth century, the consensus was that all women could and should be

mothers. Mothers held the responsibility for the development and improvement of children through sound education and healthy and hygienic child-rearing techniques. Mothers also represented the moral center of the family and supposedly possessed infinitely virtuous qualities that could only be maintained within the home. Women who failed to live up to this high standard of maternity risked becoming a lesser being, both literally and figuratively. Maternity, as a biological function, meant that women who failed to uphold the standards of motherhood risked the deformation of their own bodies and the corruption of the family. The other side to this strict limitation was the common wisdom that anything that promoted motherhood had to be in the best interest of society at large. Thus, feminists had to walk a fine line. On the one hand, they had to counter those that saw feminism as a threat to the maternal ideal. On the other hand, they had to embrace the positive image of mothers as a way to justify the reforms they desired. If feminists went too far on the former tactic, they risked provoking those they wished to mollify. If a feminist went too far with the latter tactic, they risked watering down their message altogether. This rhetorical tightrope proved difficult, but manageable. Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the number of politicians who at least tacitly accepted the need for improved women's rights steadily increased. However, the lack of a strong, unified feminist movement and the underlying antagonism towards feminism among Argentine males made it easy for politicians to ignore and delay the implementation of feminist legislation. During the 1930s conservative politicians made sure that suffrage legislation never left committee, and even made a passing attempt at undoing the Civil Code reform of 1926. However, feminists never lost the ground they had won, and the examples of other nations and of San Juan province made sure that suffrage remained a viable political achievement. It only remained for a government that took suffrage seriously to step in.

The populist regime of Juan Perón, grounded in mass political mobilization, embraced the idea of suffrage. However, the implementation of the reform by no means satisfied the older feminist groups and leaders. As Perón built his following among labor unions in the mid-1940s, he did not neglect to include female workers. Though he did not make the demands of women workers his priority, his willingness to consider their needs at all proved to be an immense improvement for those laborers. Evita's emergence as a powerful presence in her husband's administration energized the female sector of the Peronist movement, making suffrage a new priority for the government. Once suffrage became a reality, Evita wasted little time organizing Argentine women in a new political entity, rapidly surpassing the accomplishments of all prior feminist organizations. The Peronists deliberately alienated the older feminists (a task made easier by the ideological gap between these feminists and Perón) placing Evita at the center of Argentine feminism during the rest of her life and beyond. Evita controlled the Peronist Women's Party with absolute authority, and was quick to remove those who challenged, or even questioned, Peronist doctrine. While this rigid control eroded following Evita's death in 1952, the hegemony of the Party over women's political activity persisted until the collapse of the Peronist regime in 1955. The aftermath of the "Revolución Libertadora" left Argentine feminism almost utterly directionless.

In the years following Perón's overthrow and exile, new insurgent groups arose that acted in his name, though not always on his orders. Leftist groups such as the montoneros made use of Peronist rhetoric and imagery to agitate against the military-backed administrations of the late 1950s and 60s. Such groups found Evita to be an especially evocative symbol. Leftist revolutionaries claimed that Evita would have fought alongside them had she survived. Leftist Peronists also led the demands for the return of Evita's body, which the 1955 government had hidden in order to prevent her corpse becoming a rallying

symbol for Peronists- a strategy that completely backfired. Women participated in these revolutionary groups as fighters and as supporters, but rarely served in leadership roles[860]. Evita continued to hold an important role in Peronism, but that did not translate into female leadership in political movements.

Pressure on the government eventually led to Perón's return to Argentina and the presidency in 1973. As part of his return, Perón successfully placed his new wife, María Estela Martínez de Perón (Isabel), in the vice-presidency. When Perón died the following year, Isabel became the first (and thus far only) woman to serve as president of Argentina. However, she proved to be entirely unprepared for the job, and her administration collapsed rapidly. The military regime that removed her from power in 1976 became infamous for its abuse of human rights. However, this abusive authoritarianism set the stage for one of the most celebrated grass-roots movements in Argentine history- the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. The Mothers, as they are known, began to stage weekly demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo in order to demand news of their "disappeared" relatives. Like the early feminists, the Mothers used their maternal status as a means to an end, legitimizing their protests and winning supporters, though they also suffered verbal abuse and intimidation from the government and its supporters. The Mothers also experienced fragmentation along class lines following the return to democracy in 1983.[861] However, the group continues to operate as a reminder of the terrors of the "Dirty War" and continues to affect government policy, as the recent efforts of the Kirchner administration to revisit the abuses of the military regime attest.[862]

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[860] Mónica Deleis, Ricardo de Titto and Diego L. Arguideguy, *Mujeres de la política argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2001), 423-33.

[861] Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmingotn, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994).

[862] http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGAMR1312122003

In electoral politics, women lacked a voice in government until the return of democracy in the 1980s. In the first few elections of the 1980s, women made up less than 5% of those elected to Congress. However, in 1991 the "Ley de Cupos" (Quota Law) dictated that at least 30% of the electoral candidates for each party had to be women. Furthermore, these women had to be in "winnable positions" on the party lists. The sharing of the congressional delegation between the labor unions, male party and female party of the Peronists inspired the law, which had support from women of all parties, as well as the backing of President Carlos Menem. In subsequent elections, the number of women elected surged to over 25% of congressional seats. In the constitutional convention of 1994, women delegates secured the inclusion of the U.N Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and blocked a clause prohibiting abortion. However, female candidates have not done as well in provincial elections, nor have they held a strong presence in the executive branch, notwithstanding the creation of a national women's agency under Menem (interestingly, this agency was dubbed the "National Council of Women"). Nor have politically active women put aside ideological differences. Female politicians do not seem to cross party lines any more than their male colleagues do, despite the encouragement of unaffiliated "feministas."[863] Ideology and class remain strong barriers against unity for women.

In studying the history of the women's movement in Argentina, we have repeatedly emphasized class, political ideology, and to a lesser extent personality as the principle obstacles to a unified feminist movement. While by no means the only categories used to divide humanity, class and ideology have a particular influence in the case of Argentine feminism that derives from their reflection of

[863] Georgina Waylen, "Gender and Democratic Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Consolidation in Argentina and Chile," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 32:3, October 2000, p.775-82.

daily experience in Argentina. Gaps between socio-economic classes were acute in Argentina, reflecting both the phenomenal economic growth of the nation and the influx of European immigrants. While this immigration did contribute to social tensions in the nation, there is no evidence that ethnic differences played any role in the fragmentation of Argentine feminism. Indeed, every major immigrant group in Argentina had its representatives among the most prominent feminist leaders, several of whom- including Julieta Lanteri (Italian) and Alicia Moreau (French)- were immigrants themselves.

Thus class remains as the chief factor in describing the differing experiences of Argentine women. As for political ideology, this provided the means by which the leading feminists divided themselves. Though they all shared similar class backgrounds, feminist leaders nevertheless formulated widely differing strategies and priorities for the women's movement. These ideological confrontations augmented and reflected the personality conflicts that led to the fragmentation of the National Council of Women particularly. Many of the first feminist leaders were also among the first Argentine women to enter higher education and the white-collar professions. Cecilia Grierson, the first woman doctor in Argentina, competed with Council co-founder Alvina Van Praet de Sala for leadership of that organization, leading to Grierson's departure. This story illustrates the way in which the determination and personal strength needed to achieve their own goals also made it difficult for feminist leaders to co-operate effectively. Class, ideology, and to a lesser extent personality conflicts, constitute the most important explanatory factors for the delays in the success of suffrage. However, these divisions might not have mattered as much if the government had perceived a need to grant women voting rights more readily.

The lack of incentive for the government to implement suffrage is equally critical to this history. Despite the conflicts within the feminist movement, most mainstream politicians came to accept the basic arguments in favor of suffrage

by the late 1920s. At that time, suffrage legislation appeared to be on the verge of success. However, following the coup of 1930 and the appearance of the Justo administration, suffrage projects languished in Congress despite the concerted efforts of Socialist congressmen. At that time, the government simply did not require or wish for the support of a larger electorate. The political manipulations that gave the 1930s the title of "The Infamous Decade" made the extension of political rights not only unnecessary, but also counterproductive. Indeed, Justo and his successors attempted to reverse the electoral reforms of the 1910s in order to make their control of the voting process that much more secure. In contrast, the Perón administration actively encouraged mass political participation as the basis of its authority. The inclusion of women as participants fit in neatly with Peronist political strategy by doubling the number of legal participants in elections. The arguments for suffrage had not changed between 1930 and Perón's election in 1946, but the needs of those in power certainly had. Feminists had long since succeeded in making women's suffrage a viable option in national politics- all that remained was for a government willing to make use of that option to come on the scene.

A comparison between Argentina and its neighbors Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile highlights the importance of government and strong political allies in overcoming the divisions among feminists to make suffrage a reality. Both nations implemented suffrage in 1932, at the same time that Argentina appeared to be on the verge of a similar move. Uruguay and Brazil also enacted their suffrage laws at a time of political upheaval, not unlike the circumstances surrounding the Peronist law in 1947. In Uruguay, competing political parties looking for an electoral advantage consented to female suffrage, hoping to gain an edge among the newly enfranchised voters. In Brazil, the 30s brought the populist regime of Getúlio Vargas into power. Like Perón, Vargas ruled his nation with a firm hand, at times ruling as a dictator. However, he based his

leadership on mass support (again, like Perón) and early on in his rule he brought women's voting rights into being. Finally, in Chile, as Karin Rosemblatt shows us, those in power deemed repression to be useless and instead sought popular, and feminist, cooperation. "The resulting patterns of alliance and conflict between elites and their presumed subordinates," Rosemblatt argues, "granted the latter important venues of influence."[864] These patterns of alliance, which did not fully emerge in Argentina until the Perón era, eventually gave women the opportunity to vote. These cases demonstrate that, without a strong popular following, feminist movements could not bring about suffrage on their own. Both nations had feminist groups, much as Argentina did, and these groups had their own divisions of class and ideology. However, in Uruguay and Brazil the crisis provoked by the world-wide economic depression brought to power governments willing to adapt feminist rationales to their own political well-being.[865] In Argentina, in contrast, the new government pursued a different strategy, one that put it into opposition with feminist leaders. The hostility of the government combined with the continuing fragmentation of the feminist movement in Argentina based on class and ideology proved to be formidable obstacles to the success of women's suffrage. In order to overcome those obstacles, there needed to be either a new government or a new movement among women that would make female political rights a reality.

The Peronist regime ultimately provided both a new attitude in government toward suffrage and a new movement among women, bypassing the older feminist organizations. Perón made a point of opening his movement to all

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[864] Karin Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4.

[865] Asunción Lavrin, "Women's Politics and Suffrage in Uruguay," in *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); June E. Hahner, *Emancipating The Female Sex: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

working class individuals regardless of sex. While the larger and more powerful male-dominated unions retained their importance, Perón's cultivation of female working class support secured the loyalty of these women in a way that none of the feminist groups could achieve. That Perón then acquired a dynamic assistant in Evita only improved matters as far as winning over working women was concerned, and with this backing the suffrage law of 1947 could hardly fail. Furthermore, Perón did not take female support for granted, and Evita's organization of the Peronist Women's Party guaranteed a large female support base for Peronism. The direct aid provided through the Eva Perón Foundation and the *unidades básicas* of the Women's Party maintained the relationship, which Perón's critics labeled as simple vote-buying. Nevertheless, women could feel themselves to be active participants in the Peronist government. This gave women a sense of belonging and empowerment that no previous movement had been able to provide. Concrete benefits proved far more important than ideological abstractions in winning over female political support.

The story of Argentine feminism presents some interesting possibilities for the history of women's political movements throughout Latin America and beyond. If the pattern of populist adoption of women's suffrage holds true, it would provide a clear explanation for the timing of voting rights laws in Latin America- regimes that sought broad-based legitimacy found an easy solution in women's suffrage. A more broadly applicable generalization may be that governments in certain nations gave women the vote in times of crisis. For example, most of Europe and North America passed suffrage laws in the wake of the World Wars, while in Africa and Asia the vote came with independence in the 1950s and 60s. This connection does not appear in every case, however. In Mexico, women's suffrage became in a reality in 1953, well after the revolutionary ferment of the 1910s and 20s and the populist-style regime of Lazaro Cárdenas.

Such exceptions require more attention from scholars than has yet been paid, but do not necessarily weaken the validity of the larger pattern.

Along with the global pattern of women's suffrage, the communication between women's organizations also merits close inspection. The links between feminist organizations in Argentina to international entities (such as the International Council of Women and Socialist Parties) demonstrates that some women actively sought to unite their sex in a global quest for a better life. These links provided support for the early feminist organizations in Argentina, and provided models for strategy. Suffrage laws in Europe and North America gave feminists in Latin America a solid precedent that they could use in advancing similar legislation in their own countries. Political and intellectual links among women also contributed to the formation of international organizations, including the League of Nations and the United Nations.[866] Studies conducted on women's involvement in international development tend to focus on the anglophone world. This focus makes sense given the importance of those counties to the growth of global political groups. However, there is room for closer inspection of the unique contributions of women in other parts of the world.

The local as well as the international experience of feminism also bears closer examination. The bulk of this study has been devoted to the activities of feminists and women's groups based almost exclusively in the city of Buenos Aires. Apart from a brief look at San Juan in the 1920s, the present work has largely neglected the interior of Argentina. This neglect is based largely on the overwhelming importance on the part of Buenos Aires as a center of political activity, and hence the greater availability of research material there. It is possible that this importance has obscured provincial feminist groups active

[866] See Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth Century Feminism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999) and Patricia Ward D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848-1948* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999) for examples of such studies.

during the same period of time. There were, for example, women's groups based in the interior affiliated with the National Council of Women. Further investigation may reveal the nature of the relationship between the Council and those member groups whose activities were at a remove from the power struggles of Van Praet and Grierson. The priorities of women in the city did not necessarily match those of the rural (or urban) interior, and these differences require exploration in order to get a complete sense of the women's movement in all of Argentina.

Closer inspection of working class accounts of feminism will be equally important to creating the fullest possible picture of women's political activism in Argentina. In this work I have attempted to shed some light one female working class organizations and their responses to the events of the early twentieth century. Women from the middle and upper class had better access to education and to the resources needed to publish their opinions. Discovering similar records for working class individuals of either sex inevitably poses greater challenges. However, in order to test fully the idea that working class women simply were not interested in feminist organization, for whatever reason, requires that the effort to find these accounts must be made. Daniel James has already taken one innovative approach to uncovering this history in his oral history of a meatpacking plant worker. However, closer inspection of union records and working class publications, such as those Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson has made for Chile, may yet provide greater insight into this sector of the population. Distinctions between urban and rural working women should also be made, for reasons already discussed- different experiences inevitably lead to different decisions in life.[867]

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[867] Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life, History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

In order to appreciate the impact of women's suffrage on the lives of Argentine women, an examination of the political experiences of women following Perón's fall from power will be required. The scope of this project only included the first few elections in which women took part, with the intention of showing the immediate consequences of the suffrage law. However, the political landscape of the nation changed dramatically after 1955, and the role of women in that landscape changed with it. As activists in a variety of political movements, women built upon the strategies and arguments put forward by their predecessors. The covert nature of some of the activities involved will doubtlessly make a complete study of the period between 1955 and the second Perón government extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the attempt should be made. As for the post-Dirty War period, useful studies already exist concerning the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the development of the new class of female politicians. However, work remains to be done on the latter group in order to analyze its background. We should also recall that the women's movement has always included more than just politics. Women's groups and organizations also form around cultural activities, religion, sport, economic activities, and so forth. While I have attempted to shed some light on some of these organizations, a more detailed analysis of their activities will reveal their influence on attitudes towards women in society.

Women's suffrage ultimately represented but one facet of the feminist movement of any country, but one that symbolized the nature of that movement. Those that argued for and against female political rights had to consider and rationalize their opinions. Those who opposed the vote had to explain why a practice that played such an important role in the life of the nation, voting, had to be kept out of the hands of half of the adult population. Those who favored the vote for women had to prove that the new electorate would behave responsibly. In the process of making these arguments, both sides gave insight into their

underlying beliefs concerning women's place in society. Surprisingly, the two sides shared the notion that motherhood was an inherent condition of all women. Discourses concerning women frequently made reference to the maternal role and to the motherly virtues all women possessed. These discussions exemplified the concept of "marianismo, " the "cult of feminine spiritual superiority" (and the opposite or complement of "machismo") associated with Hispanic culture.[868] Thus, the true debate between feminists and their opponents in the first half of the century concerned the best way to allow women to fulfill their maternal duties. This maternal focus held true regardless of philosophical background or political affiliation. However, this idea did not represent the reality for most women. Class, ethnicity, and personal experience all deviated from the concept of a shared female experience. Yet the concept of common femininity remained, and remains, very powerful, shaping legislation and attitudes towards a goal of equal right, which usually means trying to "level the playing field" between men and women. Assuming such a leveling can be accomplished, there still remains a great deal of work to be done. The movement for women's rights as human beings continues to be played out in myriad forms in every corner of the globe. The Argentine case is but one example of the intersections of these efforts.

[868] Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 3-15.

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La Mujer y La Casa

¡Mujeres!

Mujeres Argentinas

El Mundo

El Mundo Peronista

La Nación

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La Obra

El País

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